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The Whole Scriptures.

BY

THE REV. C. SIMEON, M.A.

FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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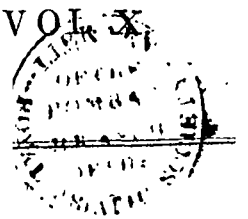
VOL. X.



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PRINTED BY RICHARD WATTS:

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CADELL AND DAVIES, STRAND; AND HATCHARD, PICCADILLY;
DEIGHTON AND SONS, AND NICHOLSON, CAMBRIDGE; PARKER, OXFORD;
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CONTENTS.

VOL. X.

Skeleton		Page
1016.	*Thanks to God for his Sovereign Grace and Mercy*	1
1017.	*The Wisdom of God in Redemption*	7
1018.	*The Spirit's Influences as a Spirit of Wisdom*	10
1019.	*Christ the Head of the Church*	15
1020.	*Original Sin stated, and improved*	19
1021.	*Salvation by Grace not hostile to Good Works*	25
1022.	*The States of the Regenerate and the Unregenerate contrasted*	30
1023.	*The exalted Privileges of true Christians*	35
1024.	*The unsearchable Riches of Christ*	39
1025.	*Prayer the Means of the Richest Blessings*	46
1026.	*God's Power to bless his People*	49
1027.	*A Consistent Walk enjoined*	53
1028.	*The Use of a Stated Ministry*	58
1029.	*Grieving the Spirit*	63
1030.	*Christ's Love a Pattern for Ours*	68
1031.	*A Consistent Walk enjoined*	72
1032.	*Redeeming the Time*	77
1033.	*The Perfecting of the Church is the End of all that Christ has done for it*	79

Skeleton		Page
1034.	*Union with Christ*	83
1035.	*Growth in Grace*	88
1036.	*Christ magnified in our Body*	92
1037.	*St. Paul's Dilemma*	97
1038.	*A Holy Conversation recommended*	101
1039.	*Suffering for Christ's Sake a Gift of God*	104
1040.	*Unity recommended*	108
1041.	*The Exaltation of Christ*	113
1042.	*Practical Religion enforced*	116
1043.	*The True Christian delineated*	120
1044.	*Stedfastness in God*	123
1045.	*Christian Moderation*	126
1046.	*A Dissuasive from Carefulness*	131
1047.	*Extent and Source of the Christian's Power*	135
1048.	*Prayer for Growth in Grace*	139
1049.	*Sanctification the End of Redemption*	143
1050.	*Preaching Christ*	148
1051.	*The Fulness that is in Christ*	152
1052.	*The Christian's Completeness in Christ*	164
1053.	*Triumphs of the Cross*	169
1054.	*The Exalted State of a Christian*	173
1055.	*The Importance of Sanctification*	176
1056.	*Love to the Scriptures recommended*	180
1057.	*The Relative Duties explained*	184
1058.	*True Piety described*	191
1059.	*The Manner in which the Gospel becomes effectual*	196
1060.	*Scope and End of the Christian Ministry*	201
1061.	*The Ministerial Character portrayed*	205

Skeleton		Page
1062.	*The Duty of those who are Called*	211
1063.	*A due Reception of the Gospel*	215
1064.	*Christians the Joy of their Ministers*	219
1065.	*The People's Stability is the Minister's Comfort,*	225
1066.	*The Effect of Love on Universal Holiness*	230
1067.	*Advancement in Holiness enforced*	237
1068.	*The Resurrection*	242
1069.	*Watchfulness enjoined*	246
1070.	*Quenching the Spirit*	258
1071.	*Abstaining from all Appearance of Evil*	262
1072.	*Complete Sanctification to be sought after*	266
1073.	*The State of the Thessalonian Church*	272
1074.	*Christ's Coming to judge the World*	278
1075.	*Meetness for Heaven desired*	283
1076.	*The Salvation of Men traced to its proper Source,*	287
1077.	*The Spread of the Gospel*	292
1078.	*St. Paul's Benevolence*	295
1079.	*Paul's Conversion*	299
1080.	*The Mediation of Christ*	303
1081.	*Godliness profitable unto all Things*	309
1082.	*The Quality of Men's Works discovered in the Day of Judgment*	315
1083.	*The Gospel productive of Good Works*	321
1084.	*Godliness with Contentment*	325
1085.	*The True Use of Riches*	329
1086.	*Effectual Calling*	335
1087.	*Confidence in God a Source of Consolation*	338
1088.	*The Equity of God's Procedure*	342
1089.	*The Early Knowledge of Timothy*	348

Skeleton		Page
1090.	*The Excellency of the Scriptures*	352
1091.	*Apostacy of Demas*	357
1092.	*The Gospel productive of Holiness*	361
1093.	*The Work of the Trinity in Redemption* . .	365
1094.	*The True Way of promoting good Works* . .	375
1095.	*The Efficacy of the Gospel*	380
1096.	*The Excellency of Christ's Person and Government*	387
1097.	*The Ministry of Angels*	392
1098.	*Christ's Superiority to Angels*	399
1099.	*The Ends of Christ's Incarnation*	404
1100.	*Christ's Superiority to Moses*	409
1101.	*The Reason why Men are so little profited by the Gospel*	414
1102.	*The Word of God quick and powerful* . . .	421
1103.	*Encouragement derived from the Character of Christ*	426
1104.	*The Slow Process of many reproved*	432
1105.	*The Danger of Apostacy*	436
1106.	*The Things that accompany Salvation* . . .	441
1107.	*The Superiority of the Christian above the Mosaic Dispensation*	447
1108.	*Christ's Priesthood, and Ability to save* . .	451
1109.	*Christ the Mediator of the New Covenant* . .	456
1110.	*The Perfection of Christ's Sacrifice*	462
1111.	*Stedfastness and Activity in God's Service inculcated*	467
1112.	*The Evil and Danger of Apostacy*	473
1113.	*The Benefit of Past Experience*	479

Skeleton		Page
1114.	*The True Means of Persevering to the End*	484
1115.	*The Nature of Faith*	492
1116.	*Abel's Offering instructive to us*	497
1117.	*Noah's Faith*	503
1118.	*Abraham's Life a Pattern for Ours*	507
1119.	*The Practical Efficacy of Faith*	512
1120.	*Abraham offering up Isaac*	514
1121.	*Moses' Choice*	521
1122.	*Moses' Faith in relation to the Passover*	526
1123.	*The Walls of Jericho thrown down by Faith*	532
1124.	*Rahab concealing the Spies*	538
1125.	*God's Estimate of his People*	544
1126.	*The Advantages enjoyed under the Christian Dispensation*	549
1127.	*Afflictions the Fruit of God's Love*	553
1128.	*The Danger of Despising or Dishonouring the Gospel*	559
1129.	*The transcendent Excellency of the Christian Dispensation*	564
1130.	*God to be served with Reverential Fear*	569
1131.	*Compassion to the Distressed inculcated*	575
1132.	*God's promised Presence an Encouragement to Duty*	580
1133.	*Caution against False Doctrines*	584
1134.	*The Sacrifices to be offered by Christians*	591
1135.	*The Duty of People, and the Responsibility of Ministers*	598

MXVI.

THANKS TO GOD FOR HIS SOVEREIGN GRACE AND MERCY.

Eph. i. 3—12. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he has chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved: in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he had purposed in himself; that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will; that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

IN our progress through the holy Scriptures, we are necessitated to investigate, in its turn, every doctrine of our holy religion. There are indeed some doctrines which appear to be almost wholly proscribed: but we do not conceive ourselves at liberty to pass over any part of the Sacred Records as improper for discussion, provided we enter into it with the humility and modesty that become us. It is undeniable that the Apostles mention occasionally, and without the

smallest appearance of hesitation, the doctrines of predestination and election: and therefore we are bound to explore the meaning of the Inspired Writers in reference to these passages, as well as to any others. We are aware that great difficulties attend the explanation of these doctrines; (though certainly not greater than attend the denial of them:) and we are aware also, that they are open to abuse: but there is no doctrine which has not its difficulties; nor any which has not been abused: and, that we may not be supposed to entertain an undue partiality for these obnoxious tenets, or to wish to establish them on inadequate grounds, we have selected a large portion of Scripture which cannot easily be perverted; and which is indeed so plain, that it speaks for itself. We shall be careful also to bring them forward precisely in the way in which they are declared by the Apostles themselves, that is, not in a speculative and controversial way, but in a practical manner, as incentives to holy gratitude and obedience.

St. Paul, under a deep sense of the mercies vouchsafed to himself and to the whole Church at Ephesus, breaks forth into the devoutest acknowledgments to that God from whom they had flowed, and to whom all possible thanks and praise were due.

In considering his words, we shall shew,

I. What are those blessings which we have received from our God—

"He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings"—

[The Ephesian Church, though chiefly composed of Gentiles, consisted in part of Jews also[a]. And, though it is possible there might be some hypocrites there, as well as in other Churches, St. Paul does not stop to make distinctions of that kind, but speaks of them all, in the judgment of charity, as real Christians, and partakers of all the blessings which by their profession they were supposed to possess. As Believers, they had been blessed with "*spiritual* blessings in *heavenly* things[b]," widely different from those which were possessed by any "*natural* man," and from those which the *earthly* and *carnal* Jews expected their Messiah

[a] Acts xviii. 19, 20, 24, 28. with ver. 11, 12, 13 of our text, where the distinction is made between "*we*" Jews "who first trusted in Christ," and "*ye*" Gentiles who believed afterwards. See also Ch. ii. 16—18. [b] See the margin.

Messiah to bestow. Of these, some of the principal are here enumerated.

God has *adopted us into his family—dealt with us as children* —and *given to us the inheritance of children.*

Once the Believer was "afar off" from God, being an "alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:" but by an act of rich mercy and grace he has been adopted by God, and made to stand in the relation to him of a child to a Father. Though he neither has any thing, nor ever can have any thing, that can recommend him to God, yet "is he accepted" to the Divine favour, having all his past iniquities "forgiven," and his soul washed from all its stains, in "the Redeemer's blood." Being thus brought into the nearest relation to God, he is treated, "not as a servant, who knows not what his lord doeth; but as a son," who may fitly be made acquainted with all his Father's will. To him is that stupendous mystery made known, that, in the time appointed of the Father, the whole intelligent creation of men and angels, who were once of one family, but were separated by the fall of man, shall be brought once more under the the same Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, who at first created them, and to whom originally they paid all due allegiance. As to men, there should be no difference between them in this respect: the common Father of all would equally receive all, whether Jews or Gentiles, and incorporate them all into one body, who should equally and without any distinction be partakers of his grace, and heirs of his glory. For all of them without exception, provided only they believe in him, he has provided an inheritance, to which, on the instant that they believe in him, they become entitled, and which, after the period fixed for their abode on earth, they shall possess to all eternity.]

These spiritual blessings are given to us "in Christ"—

[All of them without exception are the purchase of his blood, the fruit of his intercession, and the gifts of his grace. They are all treasured up in him; and when He is given to us, they are made over to us, as the ore in the mine. They were all given to Him, in the first instance, as our Head and Representative, and can be possessed by us only as we are found in him. Are we chosen? it is "in him." Are we predestinated to the adoption of children? it is "in him." Are we accepted? it is "in him." Are we forgiven? it is "in him." Are we brought into one body? it is "in him." Have we obtained an inheritance? it is "in him." Are we "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, as the earnest of that inheritance?" it is "in him." Are we blessed with all spiritual blessings? it is "in him," and in him alone. O that we were more sensible of our

obligations to Christ in reference to these things! Is it not surprising, that any one can read the passage before us, and overlook Christ, who throughout the whole of it is represented as The "All in all?" Let this be borne in mind; that, whilst all is traced to the Father as the original source, all must be referred to Christ as the procuring cause, and be received from Christ as the fountain-head: and it is only by receiving Christ himself that we can ever partake of any one of his benefits.]

Having noticed the benefits given to us in Christ, we proceed to shew,

II. In what way he has communicated them to us—

On this depends, in a great measure, the debt of gratitude we owe him. If in the bestowment of them he has been forestalled by earnest solicitations on our part, and been prevailed upon only by the great and meritorious services which we have rendered to him, then, though we have reason to bless him, we have also reason to bless ourselves, and may justly claim for ourselves some part of the honour of our own salvation. But he has communicated these blessings to us,

1. In a way of sovereignty—

[He is a Sovereign, and it is only of his own will and pleasure that he has formed any creature whatsoever. We feel his sovereignty in this respect. Let any man ask himself, "Why was I created at all? Why formed a man, and not a beast? Why was I born of Christian, and not of Heathen parents? why under the meridian splendor of Gospel light, and not in the darker ages of the Church? Why was I preserved in life, whilst millions have closed their eyes upon this world as soon as they were brought into it? Why was I endued with intelligence, whilst so many are in a state of idiotcy, and devoid of reason? To all such questions there is but one answer; "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." And this is the true answer that must be given to all inquiries respecting the spiritual blessings which he has bestowed upon us: they are all the fruit of his free and sovereign grace. "He has chosen us from before the foundation of the world," and "predestinated us to the enjoyment of them." He has done this purely "of his own will and pleasure:" and in doing it, he has consulted nothing but his own glory: it has been "according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace[c]." Yet, whilst his predestination of us is the result of "his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself," and can be referred to nothing but "his own purpose and grace," we are

[c] ver. 5, 6.

are not to imagine that he is actuated by a *mere arbitrary* volition; for it is a volition founded in "counsel[d]," though the reasons by which he is actuated are unknown to us. Were this doctrine dependent only on a single expression, we should speak of it with the more diffidence: but, in the passage before us, it is as the warp, which pervades the whole piece: it cannot, like the woof, be separated, and made to give way to some more palatable sentiment: it is impossible for any man to read the passage with an unprejudiced mind, and not to acknowledge that this is its obvious import; and that nothing but the most determined efforts of ingenious and laboured criticism can extract from it any other meaning.]

2. In a way of holiness—

[One ground on which many object to the doctrines of election and predestination is, that these doctrines are hostile to the interests of morality. But for such an objection there is no real foundation. On the contrary, they are the greatest security of a life of holiness, seeing that they have insured to us the attainment of holiness as a preparation for the ultimate possession of glory. God, we are told, has "chosen us:" but to what has he chosen us? to salvation independent of holiness? No; but to salvation in the way of holiness: He has chosen us, "*that we should be holy*, and without blame before him in love." Here it deserves particular attention, that God has not chosen us because *we were* holy, or because he foresaw *we should become* holy, but *in order that we might be* holy: he has chosen us to holiness as *the means*, as well as to glory as *the end*. He has ordained both the means and the end; and *the end* solely *by the means*. Hence, wherever election and predestination are spoken of, they are spoken of in this view, as having respect to holiness, and as assuring to us the attainment of holiness: God has chosen us "through sanctification of the Spirit, as well as through the belief of the truth[e]," and has "predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son[f]."

Let this be duly considered, and it will remove the greatest obstruction in our minds to the reception of these deep mysterious truths. When once we see, that they secure infallibly the attainment of holiness in the way to glory, and that no man is entitled to think himself one of God's elect, any farther than the holiness of his life bears testimony to him, we shall soon renounce our prejudices, and willingly concede to sovereign grace the whole glory of our salvation.]

3. In a way of wisdom and prudence—

[Truly this great salvation is the most stupendous effort both of

[d] ver. 9, 11. with 2 Tim. i. 9. [e] 2 Thess. ii. 13. 1 Pet. i. 2.
[f] Rom. viii. 29.

of wisdom and prudence; of wisdom, in its contrivance, and of prudence, in its administration. How wonderfully does it mark God's indignation against sin, even at the moment that it extends mercy to the sinner; since it shews the sinner, and constrains him to acknowledge, that, if the wrath due to him had not been borne by his Surety, he never could have been saved at all. It shews him farther, that in this way of salvation, through the sacrifice of the Son of God, all the Divine perfections are glorified; insomuch that, whilst the claims of justice and of mercy appear to oppose each other, they so harmonize together, that justice is exercised in a way of mercy, and mercy in a way of justice. Further, in this way of salvation the soul of the Believer is so penetrated with wonder and with love, that he cannot but yield himself up unreservedly to God, and count a thousand lives too little to consecrate to his service, or to sacrifice for his glory. Nor is there less of prudence in the administration of it, than there is of wisdom in its contrivance: for, notwithstanding it is dispensed in a sovereign way altogether according to God's good pleasure, he never interferes with the liberty of the human will, nor ever draws any one but by "the cords of a man." It is by presenting truth to the mind, and motives to the heart, that he overcomes men, and "makes them willing in the day of his power." Infinitely various are the ways in which he dispenses his blessings: and even at this time his people are able to see most unsearchable wisdom in the way in which he has dealt with them, so as to make them see in the clearest light the extent of their obligations to him, and to furnish them with songs of praise, which each is ready to think he shall sing the loudest of any in the kingdom of heaven. Moreover, so infallible are the means he uses, that he never yet failed in any one instance to accomplish in any soul the purposes of his grace, or to carry on and perfect the work he had begun. Well then may it be said, in reference to "the riches of his grace" which he has dispensed to us, that "he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are not able to receive these mysterious truths—

[We are far from thinking that the doctines of election and predestination are of primary and fundamental importance. We well know that many eminently pious persons have not been able to receive them: and we have no doubt but that a person may serve God most acceptably, though he should not have an insight into these mysterious truths. We only ask, that you will be content to wave them for the present, and not set yourselves against them, as too many are apt to do. If you have not a preparation of mind for the reception of them, you will only perplex yourselves by

by dwelling upon them, and give advantage to Satan to distress your minds. Be content to receive for the present the fundamental doctrines of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and seek to experience them in their full extent. Contemplate the blessings with which God the Father hath blessed you through the mediation of his Son; and ever bear in mind, that you are indebted for them all to the Father, as the original source of all; to the Son, as procuring them for you by the virtue of his death; and to the Holy Spirit, as the great agent by whom they are communicated to your souls. Enjoy them in this view, and bless God for them in this view; and "what else you know not now, you shall know hereafter."]

2. Those who have embraced them, and found delight in them—

[Enjoy them for yourselves; but do not unnecessarily obtrude them upon others. Give milk to babes, and strong meat to those only who are of age to digest it. Be careful too that you do not in any respect abuse them, as the habit of too many is. The decrees of God do not supersede the necessity of fear and watchfulness on your part. The hour that you begin to relax your diligence, from an idea that God will carry on his work in you at all events, you provoke God to abandon you to yourselves, and to give you up to the delusions of your own hearts. It is by your lives only that you can know your election of God[g]: and if you are not making advancement in holiness, you have no reason whatever to hope that you shall ever attain to glory; seeing it is by the *means* only that you can ever attain the *end*. If you would make a legitimate improvement of these doctrines, use them as means of exciting the deeper gratitude to God. Trace up to God's electing love and predestinating grace every blessing you either enjoy or hope for: and get your hearts more in unison with that of the Apostle, when he burst forth into that song of praise, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ!" Then shall you find that these truths, which are a stumbling-block to many, shall to you be as marrow and fatness to your souls.]

[g] 1 Thess. i. 3, 4.

MXVII.

THE WISDOM OF GOD IN REDEMPTION.

Eph. i. 7. *In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence.*

IN no part of the Inspired Volume are the wonders of

of Redemption more fully opened, than in the passage before us. The pardon of sin, adoption into God's family, and a participation of eternal glory, are all distinctly specified as blessings which under the Gospel we enjoy: and all are traced to Christ as the procuring cause, and to the Father as the prime source, from the riches of whose grace they flow, and to the praise of whose glory they are all ordained ——— But as the subject would be endless if we entered into it in this general view, we shall limit our observations to the words which we have just read, and notice from them,

I. The substance of the Gospel—

"In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." Here notice,

1. What is implied in this declaration—

[It is here supposed that we are in *a state of bondage* to sin and Satan, and *under guilt and condemnation* on account of sin. And this but too justly describes the condition of every Child of man. We are in a state of bondage to sin and Satan ——— And we are under guilt and condemnation on account of sin ——— We cannot more truly mark the state of man, than by comparing it with that of the fallen angels. They fell; and for their sins were cast out of heaven, and consigned over to merited punishment in hell, where they are "reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day." The difference between them and us is this: *they* are actually suffering the punishment of their sins; *we* are respited for a season: they are irremediably doomed to perdition; for *us* a remedy is provided, so that we may yet have redemption and forgiveness, if we seek it in God's appointed way.

Labour, I pray you, to realize this idea in your minds: for it is only by apprehending justly your condition without the Gospel, that you can be prepared for a participation of its blessings.]

2. What is expressed—

["Redemption" is provided for us, and "forgiveness" is offered to us, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and "through the blood" of his cross. The Lord Jesus Christ has, by his own obedience unto death, "obtained eternal redemption for us," having suffered in his own person all that was due to our sins, and having so fulfilled the law in our stead, as to bring in an everlasting righteousness, whereby we may be justified. In Him are these blessings treasured up for us, and "out of his fulness may be received by us." By believing in him, we become interested in all that

that he has done and suffered for us, and attain the actual possession of the blessings he has purchased for us — — —

This is, in few words, the sum and substance of the Gospel; as St. John has plainly told us; "This is the record, (the Gospel-record,) that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life[a]."]

The point to which we would more particularly turn your attention, is,

II. The character of the Gospel—

It is a dispensation,

1. "Rich in grace"—

[All "the glorious riches of God's grace" are here displayed. Consider the means by which this redemption is procured; even by the incarnation and death of God's only-begotten Son — — — Consider the persons for whom it is provided: not for angels, (they are left to reap for ever the bitter consequences of their sin;) but for men, who were an order of Beings far inferior to them — — — Consider how it is that any become interested in this redemption: it is in consequence of their having been from all eternity elected and predestinated to it by the sovereign and unmerited grace of God — — — From first to last it is all of grace; and designed of God to exhibit to the whole universe, through all ages, "the exceeding riches of his grace[b]." Let any one compare the state of the fallen angels in the lake of fire, and of the redeemed saints that are around the throne of God, and view the wonders of grace which have been wrought in favour of the redeemed; and then he will be able in some measure to comprehend the character of the Gospel, as a dispensation of grace.]

2. "Abundant in wisdom and prudence"—

[In order to render the salvation of man consistent with the perfections of the Deity, justice must be satisfied, and truth be kept inviolate, by the punishment of sin. But if sin be punished, how could the sinner be saved? This was a problem which not all the angels in heaven could solve. But God, by sending his own Son to be our substitute and Surety, has removed the difficulty. Sin has been punished to the full *in him:* and the law, both in its penalties and requirements, has been fulfilled in him: so that mercy may flow down to us in perfect consistency both with law and justice; and 'God may be just, and yet the justifier" of sinful man — — — Indeed the law is the more magnified, in having executed its sentence against a person of such infinite dignity; and mercy is the more exalted, in being exercised at such a cost as the blood of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son — — — Here is indeed

[a] 1 John v. 11, 12. [b] Eph. ii. 7.

indeed "the wisdom of God in a mystery:" and well may Christ be called in this view, "The wisdom of God, and the power of God."]

APPLICATION—

1. Seek to appreciate this blessed Gospel—

[We are grievously negligent in relation to this matter. Men will labour with indefatigable industry to comprehend the laws of nature; but are shamefully remiss in exploring the mysteries of grace, which are revealed to us in the Gospel ——— Let your minds be more intent on this subject, which can never be adequately comprehended, either by men or angels ———]

2. Labour to adorn it—

[Let the character of the Gospel be exemplified in you. Is it full of grace? Be ye full of praise and thanksgiving; ever cleaving to him by whom your redemption has been wrought, and adoring him by whom the Saviour himself was sent into the world ——— And is it full of wisdom? Do ye shew how harmoniously every grace may be exercised by you; and how perfectly all the attributes of the Deity, as far as they can be communicated to so frail a creature, may be transferred to, and illustrated by, his redeemed people ———]

MXVIII.

THE SPIRIT'S INFLUENCES AS A SPIRIT OF WISDOM.

Eph. i. 15—20. *Wherefore I also, after that I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.*

WE are told by our blessed Lord, that however great the pains of parturition may be, a woman remembereth no more her anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. Yet if the mother, watching the child from month to month, should see no growth in his bodily stature, nor any improvement in his intellectual faculties, her joy would soon be turned into grief, and she would

would account the death of the child a greater blessing than its birth. Somewhat similar to these are the feelings of a Minister towards those who have been born to God through his ministrations. Like "the angels in heaven, he rejoices over every sinner that is brought to repentance:" but if his subsequent care and labour be attended with no benefit to his converts, he will feel much pain and sorrow on their account: he will "travail, as it were, in birth a second time, till he see Christ completely formed in them." To see them walking in the truth, is the one object of his desire, and the summit of his joy[a]: and it is only when they stand fast in the faith, that he has a real enjoyment of his life[b]. How full of complaints was the apostle Paul, when the people to whom he had ministered did not make their profiting to appear[c]. On the contrary, he quite exulted when he heard of their growth in faith and love[d]. But in nothing did he shew his anxiety for their welfare more, than in his unwearied intercessions in their behalf.

The prayer which he offered for the Church at Ephesus, evinces clearly,

I. That the Spirit, as a Spirit of wisdom and revelation, may be obtained by all—

What was sought on behalf of all the Christians at Ephesus, may certainly be expected by Christians in every age and place—

1. We need the Spirit as much as they did in the Apostles' days—

[If we are unconverted, our eyes are blinded[e], our souls are dead[f], yea we are incapable of receiving or knowing the things of the Spirit, because we have not that spiritual discernment, whereby alone they can be discerned[g] ——— If we are converted, still we are in need of fresh supplies of the Spirit, as much as the Ephesian converts were. It is "by the Spirit only that we can know the things which have been freely given to us of God[h]." The Apostles not only had been converted, but had enjoyed the public and private instructions of their Divine Master for nearly four years: yet after his resurrection he "opened their understandings to understand the Scriptures[i]," and on the day of Pentecost

[a] 3 John 4. [b] 1 Thess. iii. 8.
[c] 1 Cor. iii. 1—3. Gal. iii. 1. & iv. 11, 19, 20. Heb. v. 12.
[d] 2 Thess. i. 3, 4. [e] 2 Cor. iv. 4. [f] Eph. ii. 1.
[g] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [h] ib. ver. 12. [i] John xvi. 13.

tecost gave them his Spirit in a more abundant measure, "to guide them into all truth[k]." It is by repeated communications of the same Spirit that we also are to obtain a deeper insight into the things of God. We find oftentimes, even after we have been enlightened, that the written word is only to us as "a dead letter;" and that unless the Spirit shine upon it, we learn no more from it than from a dial when the sun is hid behind a cloud.

If then we need the Spirit as much as they did of old, we may expect it as well as they.]

2. The promises relating to the communications of the Spirit, are made to *us*, as much as to any persons whatever—

[Those of the Old Testament extend to the Church in every age. Shall we confine to the Apostolic age such declarations as those, "Turn you at my reproof, and I will pour out my Spirit upon you[l]:" "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord[m]:" "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the House of Israel; I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them[n]:" "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes[o]?" To deny our interest in such passages as these, were to rob us of half the Scriptures.

And what shall we say to the promises of the New Testament? Shall we limit those also to the Apostles' days? Hear what our Lord says; "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him[p]?" "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water: This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive[q]." "I will send you another Comforter, who shall *abide with you for ever*[qq]." Hear what his Apostles also say: "Believe on Christ for the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost: for the promise is to you, and to your children, and *to as many as are afar off*, even *as many as the Lord our God shall call*[r]." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his[s]."

Language has neither force nor certainty, if such declarations as these be not to be applied to us.]

3. In the Liturgy of our Church we pray continually for the communications of the Spirit to our souls—

[If

[k] 1 Cor. ii. 11. with 1 John ii. 20, 27.
[l] Prov. i. 23.
[m] Isai. liv. 13. with John vi. 45.
[n] Jer. xxxi. 33, 34.
[o] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.
[p] Luke xi. 13.
[q] John vii. 37—39.
[qq] John xiv. 16.
[r] Acts ii. 38, 39.
[s] Rom. viii. 9.

[If we do not intend to mock God in our supplications, we must not only acknowledge our need of the Spirit's influence, but we must really feel it every time that we join in our public services[t]— — —]

But, to prevent misapprehension, we shall proceed to state distinctly,

II. What discoveries the Spirit will make to our souls—

This is certain, that *no new revelation is to be expected by us:* the canon of Scripture is closed: and if any man pretend to new revelations, let him confirm his pretensions, by clear and undoubted miracles; or else let him be rejected as an enthusiast and deceiver. The Spirit now enlightens men only by shining upon the written word, and opening their understandings to understand it. But in this way he will make wonderful discoveries to the soul. He will give us just views,

1. Of God himself—

[Somewhat of God may be known from books, without any supernatural aid: but the knowledge gained in that way will be merely theoretical; it will have no suitable influence upon the heart and life. But the very same truths, when applied by the Spirit to the soul, make a deep impression on the mind: they fill the soul with wonder and with love; and constrain the enraptured saint to exclaim, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee[u]! How precious does Christ appear at such seasons! how "unsearchable the length and breadth and depth and height of his incomprehensible love[x]!" These are the manifestations of himself which our blessed Lord promised to his Church[y]; and without which we cannot know aright either him or his Father[z].

Let us pray then for "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, *in*, and for, *the knowledge of him.*"]

2. Of the hope to which he has called us—

[How low are our apprehensions of the Christian's portion, when

[t] In the Prayer for the King we say, "Replenish him with the grace of thy Holy Spirit." In the Litany, "That it may please thee to illuminate all Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, with true knowledge and understanding of thy word." [*Mark this well.*] See also the Collects for 1st Sunday after Epiphany—5th Sunday after Easter—Whit-Sunday—9th Sunday after Trinity—19th ditto. Compare these with the Text; and see whether, in the judgment of our Reformers, the best and most learned of men do not still need to have the Spirit, as a Spirit of wisdom and revelation, given unto them.

[u] Job xlii. 5.

[x] Eph. iii. 18, 19.

[y] John xiv. 21—23. & xvi. 14, 15.

[z] Matt. xi. 27.

when no particular revelation of it is made to the soul! We can speak of pardon and acceptance, of grace and glory; but we speak of them with no more feeling than if they were mere fictions. But oh! what a "gloriously rich inheritance" does ours appear, when our eyes are opened by the Spirit to behold it! One Pisgah-view of the Promised Land, how does it transport the soul to heaven, and make us long to be dissolved, that we may be with Christ! As for the inheritances of princes, they then appear as worthless as the toys that amuse a child. The realities of the eternal world surpass all sublunary things, as the splendor of the sun exceeds the glimmering of a taper. "These things, which no carnal eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived, these things, I say, God *now* reveals to us by his Spirit[a];" yea, he gives us an earnest of them in our hearts[b].]

3. Of the work he has wrought in us—

[We are apt to undervalue the work that is already wrought in us, because so much remains to be done. But when God shines upon his own work, we entertain very different thoughts respecting it. It is no light matter then in our eyes to have been quickened from the dead, and "created anew in Christ Jesus." It seems no less a work than that which was "wrought for Christ, when God raised him from the dead," and "set him at his own right hand, above all the principalities and powers," whether of heaven or hell. We were dead and buried; and Satan set, as it were, the stone, the seal, the watch, to keep us securely under the power of the grave. But our God came "by the mighty working of his power," and made us triumphant over all the powers of darkness, and still "always causeth us to triumph in Christ." Truly the Believer, when he views these things, is a wonder to himself: he is a burning bush[c], a captive ruling over his oppressors[d], a worm threshing the mountains[e].]

ADDRESS—

1. Let us seek to *attain the* Christian's *character*—

[The Ephesians were already Christians: they possessed the two distinctive marks of the Christian character, "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and love unto all the saints." These marks we must possess. It is in vain to hope for the higher manifestations of the Spirit, till we have received those communications which are of prime and indispensable necessity. Till these evidences of true religion appear, neither can Ministers have any joy over you, nor you any Scriptural hope for yourselves. Come then to Christ as perishing sinners, and cast in your lot with his people, that you may have your portion with them in a better world.]

2. Let

[a] 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10. [b] Eph. i. 13, 14. [c] Exod. iii. 2.
[d] Isai. xiv. 2. [e] Isai. xli. 15.

2. Let us seek to *enjoy the* Christian's *privileges*—

[We would not that any of you should live below your privileges. "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory," is willing to bestow on you the richest gifts, and to exalt you to the sublimest happiness. He is ready to make all his glory pass before your eyes, and to proclaim in your hearing all his goodness[f]. Though he will not catch you up to Paradise, as he did the apostle Paul, or make the heavens open to you, as he did to the dying Stephen, yet will he shine into your hearts, to give you light and knowledge, of which you have at present scarcely any conception[g]. Seek then these sublime attainments, which will at once enhance your present happiness, and increase your meetness for your heavenly inheritance.]

[f] Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19. [g] 2 Cor. iv. 6.

MXIX.

CHRIST THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH.

Eph. i. 20—23. *He raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

LITTLE do men imagine what power is necessary to effect the salvation of their souls. They are ready to suppose that they can repent, and turn to God, of themselves, by the force of their own resolutions. But the creation itself was not more the product of a Divine power, than the new creation is in the souls of men. Yea, if we can conceive that any one thing needs a greater exertion of omnipotence than another, it is this. The Apostle strongly expresses this idea in the passage before us. He is praying for the Ephesian converts, that they may have just and adequate notions of the power that has been exercised towards them, in bringing them to their present state. Overwhelmed, as it were, with the thought, he accumulates all the most forcible terms that language could afford him, in order to convey some faint idea of the subject: and then he illustrates the point by the most stupendous

effort

effort of omnipotence that ever was exhibited since the foundation of the world; namely, by the raising of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and the investing of him with all power, both in heaven and earth.

In contemplating this work of omnipotence, the exaltation of Christ upon his Father's throne, we shall fix our attention upon two things:

I. His supremacy above all creatures—

The death, the resurrection, and the ascension of our Lord Jesus, we pass over in silence. It is not the *act* of our Saviour's elevation, but *the state to which* he is elevated, which we propose for your present consideration. This includes,

1. A state of dignity—

["The right hand of God" is a metaphorical expression for the place of the highest dignity and glory in the heavenly world. There Jesus sits, exalted "far above all" creatures in earth, in hell, or in heaven. The phrase, "principalities and powers," is applied in Scripture to men[a], to devils[b], and to the holy angels[c]. And the Apostle evidently intended to comprehend them all, because he specified yet further "every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." Now it should seem, that as, on earth, there are different ranks and orders of magistrates, from the king, who is supreme, to those who exercise the most limited jurisdiction, so is there a gradation of Beings both in heaven and hell. We read of Michael, the archangel; and of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils; and to them we ascribe a pre-eminence among their fellows. But, however exalted any creature may be, Jesus Christ is raised "far above" him. The lustre of the whole universe, in comparison of his, would be only like that of the twinkling stars before the meridian sun: they may have a splendor in his absence; but before him they are constrained to hide their inglorious heads: they are eclipsed, they vanish at his presence. If he but suffer one ray of his majesty to appear, men fall, as dead, at his feet; devils tremble; and "angels worship him" with profoundest adoration.]

2. A state of power—

[While Jesus yet hanged upon the cross, "he spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly in it." From that time "all things were put under his feet;" and more especially from the moment that he was seated on his Mediatorial throne. It is true that "we see not yet (as the Apostle says) all things

[a] Tit. iii. 1. [b] Eph. vi. 12. [c] Eph. iii. 10.

things put under him." But though they are not *visibly*, they are *in fact*. All his enemies are like the five kings of Canaan, when Joshua and all the Elders of Israel put their feet upon their necks. They are living indeed; but their power is broken: and they are doomed to a speedy and ignominious death. Devils are more aware of this than men: when they saw Jesus in the days of his flesh, they asked, "Art thou come to torment us before our time?" Still however they combine with men, and stimulate them to oppose his will. But when they are consulting together, saying, "Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us," he "laughs them to scorn, and has them in derision." He suffers them to accomplish their own will, as far as it may subserve his purposes; and "the remainder of their wrath he restrains." Full of pride and blasphemy, they boast what great things they will do: but "he puts his hook in their nose, and his bridle in their jaws," and in a moment brings all their boasted projects to an end[d]. Whatever they may effect, they are his instruments, to "do what his hand, and his counsel, had determined before to be done." In all things "his counsel stands, and he does all his pleasure."]

By means of this supremacy, he is enabled to carry on,

II. His government of his Church—

In investing his Son with "all power in heaven and in earth," God had especial respect to the welfare of his Church. He constituted his Son,

1. The Head of the Church—

[The Church is called "his body," and "his fulness." The body, we know, consists of many members: and it is the whole aggregate of members that constitutes the body: and the body, joined to the head, forms the complete man. *This is the precise idea in the text.* Every Believer is a member of Christ: the whole collective number of Believers form his entire body: and, by their union with him, Christ himself is represented as complete. The body would not be complete, if any member were wanting; nor is the head complete without the body: but the body united to the head is "the fulness," *the completion* of Christ himself[e].

The head however exercises a controul over the whole body. As being the residence of the soul, it may be said to actuate all the members: it moves in the limbs, sees in the eyes, hears in the ears, speaks in the tongue, and imparts a vital energy to the whole. Thus does Christ "fill all in all." There is not a member of his mystical body which does not derive all his strength from him. From him the understanding receives its comprehension; the

[d] Isai. xxxvii. 29. Job v. 12, 13. [e] πλήρωμα.

the will, its activity; the affections, their power. It is by him that we live; or rather, as the Apostle speaks, "he is our life." In all *persons*, there is the same absolute dependence on him: "in all" *circumstances*, his agency is wanted: (it is as much wanted to produce a good thought, as to carry it into execution.) "In all" *ages*, he is equally the true and only source of good to man. None in any place or period of the world have any thing which they did not first "receive out of his fulness[f]:" so true is it, in the strongest sense of the words, that "he filleth all in all." Thus is Christ, in his present exalted state, the living, and life-giving Head of all his Church, his Church militant, and his Church triumphant.]

2. The Head over all things for his Church's good—

[In the management of the universe, Jesus consults the best interests of his Church. If he permit evil to befal his people, it is with a view to their deeper humiliation. If, on the contrary, he fill them with peace and joy, it is for the purpose of quickening them to more holy ardor in his ways. Nothing is further from the intention of their enemies than to do them good: but they are all under his controul; and when they desire nothing so much as to frustrate his purposes, they ignorantly and unwittingly fulfil them[ff]. As, in his own case, the envy of the priests, the treachery of Judas, the cowardice of Pilate, and the blind fury of the populace, conspired to bring him to that death, which was to fulfil the Scriptures and to redeem the world, and which was of necessity to precede his exaltation to glory; so every creature, whatever be its aim, is executing his gracious purposes with respect to his Church, and is doing that very thing, which every member of the Church, if he could foresee the final issue of events, would actually wish to be done.]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. Our duty towards him—

[Is he the supreme Governor of the Universe? then we should obey his voice—and submit to his will—and seek in all things his glory. Is he in a more especial manner our Head? then we should look to him for direction, and depend on him for every thing we may stand in need of.]

2. Our security in him—

[Who shall overcome *him*, when "all things are under his feet?" or, "Who shall pluck us out of his hands," provided we belong to him? We may, with St. Paul, defy all the principalities and powers both of earth and hell[g]. Neither the Church at large,

[f] John i. 16. [ff] Gen. l. 20. [g] Rom. viii. 38, 39.

large[h], nor the smallest member of it[i], has any thing to fear. "If he be for us, none can be successfully against us[k]."]

3. Our happiness through him—

[The principal subject of the Apostle's prayer is, that we may know what mighty power God exercises towards his believing people. The exaltation of Christ is introduced by him quite incidentally, and merely for the purpose of illustrating his main point. But, having introduced the subject, he draws a parallel between the Believer's exaltation, and that of Christ. Behold then the Lord Jesus raised from the dead, and seated at his Father's right hand, far above all principalities and powers: such is the honour, and such the happiness, that is imparted to the believing soul: and even that which he now enjoys, is but a shadow of what he will enjoy to all eternity. Believer, let your expectations be enlarged: the felicity of the Head is the felicity prepared for the members: "Such honour have all his saints."]

[h] Matt. xvi. 18. [i] Amos ix. 9. Matt. xviii. 14.
[k] Rom. viii. 31. [l] Compare ver. 20. with ii. 5—7.

MXX.

ORIGINAL SIN STATED, AND IMPROVED.

Eph. ii. 3. *And were by nature children of wrath, even as others.*

AMONG the many beautiful traits which mark the character of St. Paul, we cannot but notice particularly his readiness to place himself on a level with the least and lowest of mankind, and to confess his obligations to the sovereign grace of God for all the difference that had been made between him and others. In his Epistle to Titus he gives such a representation of himself and his fellow-Apostles in their unconverted state, as was most humiliating to them, whilst it afforded rich encouragement to all who felt the plague of their own hearts. In like manner, in the Epistle before us, after shewing that the Gentile world had been altogether in a state of bondage to sin and Satan, he declares, that he himself, and all others without exception, had in fact been in a condition no less deplorable, both by nature and practice;—by practice having habitually fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and being "by nature, children of wrath, even as others."

That

That we may fully enter into the confession which he here makes, we shall,

I. Explain the terms here used—

We may notice them,

1. Separately—

[As in the preceding verse the words "*children of disobedience*" mean "disobedient children," so, in our text, "children of wrath" must be understood as importing "children doomed to wrath:" just as a similar expression of St. Peter is actually translated: what in the Greek is "sons of a curse," is in our Translation "cursed children[a]." It is a Hebraism, common throughout all the Inspired Writings.

Such, we are told, is the state of all "*by nature*." Those who are adverse to the doctrine of original sin, would interpret these words as importing, that men were in this state "by habit or custom:" but the words cannot with any propriety be so construed: the only true and proper sense of them is that which our Translators have here assigned to them[b].

The Apostle further says, that he and his fellow-Apostles were in this state, "*even as others*." The Jews were ready enough to account the Gentiles accursed: but they thought that no curse could attach to them, because they were children of Abraham. This mistake St. Paul rectifies in our text, declaring, that whatever privileges the Jews might enjoy above the Gentiles, there was in this respect no difference between them; the Jews, yea the Apostles themselves, being, by nature, children of wrath, even as others.]

2. Taken in their collective sense—

[According to their plain and obvious and undeniable import, they declare, that every Child of man, whatever be his privileges, or whatever his attainments, is by nature under the wrath of God.

All, as fallen in Adam, *deserve God's wrath*. Adam was the covenant-head and representative of all his descendants. Had he stood, they would have stood in him: and, as he fell, they fell in him. If it be thought strange, that his posterity should be responsible for his act, let it suffice to say, that, if he fell, there can be no doubt but that we, if subjected to the same trial, should have fallen also: yea, considering all the circumstances in which he was placed, (created in the fullest possession of all his faculties, having a perfect nature, and subjected only to one single trial, and having dependent on him the welfare, not of himself alone, but of all his posterity,) it was infinitely more probable that he would stand, than that we should, who come into the world in a state of infantine weakness. But, whether we approve of

[a] 2 Pet. ii. 14. [b] See Guyse's note on the text.

of it or not, so the matter is; and so it was ordained of God: and, exactly as Levi is said to have paid tithes in Abraham, (though he was not born till 150 years after the circumstance of paying tithes occurred,) merely because he was in the loins of Abraham at the time that he paid tithes to Melchizedec, so may we be justly said to have sinned in Adam, because we were in the loins of Adam when he sinned. Hence it is declared by God himself, that; "in Adam all have sinned[c]," and "in Adam all have died[d]."

Moreover, all, as partakers of Adam's fallen nature, *are fit for the wrath of God.* Adam begat children in his own fallen likeness. Indeed, being corrupt himself, he could transmit nothing but corruption to his descendants; "for who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" Now in whomsoever iniquity be found, God cannot look upon it without abhorrence: and hence it is said, that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," "neither can corruption inherit incorruption."

Further, all both as fallen in Adam, and corrupt in themselves, are actually *under a sentence of wrath*, and actually doomed to it. This is indeed an awful truth; but it is explicitly declared by an inspired Apostle, that "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners," yea, that "by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation[e]."]

Having endeavoured to ascertain the precise import of the words, we proceed to,

II. Establish the truth contained in them—

In proof of what our text asserts, we appeal,

1. To Scripture—

[Consult *the declarations of Almighty God.*—In the Old Testament he has testified, that every human Being, without exception, is corrupt, not in act only, but "in every imagination and thought of his heart[f]." And this testimony which the heart-searching God himself bore before the flood, as a reason for destroying the earth, he renewed after the flood, as a reason why he would deluge the earth no more; seeing that, if he should proceed to destroy it as soon as it should become universally corrupt, he would have to repeat his judgments continually, there being nothing but iniquity in every Child of man[g]. In the New Testament we have a similar declaration from our blessed Lord. He, assigning a reason why no unregenerate man can possibly behold the kingdom of God, says, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh[h]," and therefore incapable of enjoying a spiritual kingdom.

With

[c] Rom. v. 12. [d] 1 Cor. v. 22. [e] Rom. v. 18, 19.
[f] Gen. vi. 5. [g] Gen. viii. 21. [h] John iii. 6.

With these declarations of God agree *the confessions of his most eminent saints.* To his original corruption David traced the sin which he had committed in the matter of Uriah; not intending thereby to extenuate, but rather to aggravate, its guilt: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin hath my mother conceived me[i]." St. Paul also, speaking of the conflicts which he yet had to maintain against the corruption that remained within him, says, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing[k]:" "I see a law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members[l]." Thus we see both these eminent saints confessing that their nature, as derived from their first parents, was altogether corrupt.

To these we may add *the promises which God has made to his fallen creatures:* "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh[m]." What can be the meaning of this? What need they a new heart, if the old heart be not corrupt? or why should he promise to take away the stony heart, if the heart be not by nature hard and obdurate?

Not to multiply passages, which yet might be multiplied to a great extent, we will further appeal,]

2. To experience—

[Let any one make his observations on what passes all around him, or trace the records of his own heart, and say, Whether children, as born into the world, be not partakers both of *Adam's corruption,* and *Adam's punishment.*

Is not every child full of evil tempers and dispositions? There is, it is true, more evil in some than in others: but who ever saw "a child in whose heart folly and iniquity were not bound up?" If a child be even tolerably free from fretfulness, and impatience, and selfishness, and falsehood, is it not admired as a prodigy? And when children grow up to the exercise of reason, do they improve that reason in seeking after God? Do they not invariably shew that their dispositions are altogether earthly, and that by nature they affect only the things of time and sense? Nor is this the case with children of one age or one nation only, but of every age, and every nation, yea, of the most godly parents too, as well as of the ungodly.

And, as they inherit the corruption of Adam, so do they also his guilt and punishment. Death, we know, was the penalty of Adam's transgression; "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." But children who have never sinned in their own persons, are subjected to death: we see little new-born infants

[i] Ps. li. 5.
[k] Rom. vii. 18.
[l] Rom. vii. 23.
[m] Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

infants oppressed with sickness, and racked with pain, and cut off by an untimely stroke of death. For whose sin are they thus punished? their own? They are not capable of actual sin. It is for Adam's sin therefore that they are punished[n]: and that indisputably proves, that they are, as they are represented in our text, "children of wrath."

We do not say that children, dying before they have committed actual sin, are consigned over to everlasting death: we hope, and believe, that God does, for Christ's sake, extend his mercy to them: but this alters not the case at all: we consider only what they are in themselves, and what they deserve at God's hands, and to what, as fallen creatures, they are doomed by God's righteous law: the relief which may be afforded them by the Gospel is not the present subject of our consideration: our present position which we are to establish, and which we think we have fully established, is, that all, as born into the world, are "children of wrath."]

We will now endeavour to,

III. Suggest a suitable improvement of the subject—

Surely we may see from hence—

1. In what a deplorable condition are all they who are yet in a state of nature—

[Children of wrath were they born, and children of wrath have they continued to the present hour. We know indeed how strenuously it is asserted by many, that baptism and regeneration are the same thing, and that to look for a new nature in conversion is unnecessary. But we would ask every parent here present, Have you *invariably* found that your children, from the moment that they were baptized, put away their evil dispositions, and instantly became new creatures? Is it even *generally* found, that this change takes place at baptism? I might almost proceed to ask, Did you ever see this change so wrought by baptism, that you could not do otherwise than refer it to baptism as the means which God made use of for that end? We do not presume to say, that God never does confer a new heart in baptism; but we say, that if that be the usual, and still more the constant, means of regeneration to the children of men, it is very extraordinary that the change wrought is so rarely visible, that, if it were undeniably to appear, it would be universally esteemed a miracle. The truth is, that they who are so strenuous for this opinion, have invariably but very low notions of original sin. It is their low sense of their disease that leads them to rest in such a remedy. But, as "the fault and corruption of their nature is such as deserves God's wrath and damnation[o]," they must have a new nature

[n] Rom. v. 12, 14. [o] See the Ninth Article of our Church.

nature given to them by the operation of the Holy Ghost: they must be renewed, not externally, or partially, but inwardly, and in all the powers of their souls: they must "be renewed *in the spirit of their minds*[p]," their whole dispositions being changed from earthly and carnal to spiritual and heavenly: in a word, they must be created anew in Christ Jesus[q], and become altogether "new creatures, old things passing away, and all things becoming new[r]." The change may not unfitly be compared with a river where the tide comes: one while it flows with great rapidity from the fountain-head to the ocean: a few hours afterwards it flows with equal rapidity back again towards the fountain-head: and this change is wrought by the invisible, yet undisputed, influence of the moon. In like manner does the soul of every truly regenerate man flow back towards God, from whom but lately, with all its faculties and powers, it receded: and this change is effected by the invisible, but real and undoubted, operation of the Spirit of God: and till this change is effected, we remain under the wrath of Almighty God. O consider the wrath of God: how terrible the thought! To all eternity it will be "the wrath *to come*." May God stir us all up to flee from it, and, in newness of heart and life, to "lay hold on eternal life!"]

2. In what a happy condition are they who have been brought from a state of nature to a state of grace—

[Such, whilst they humbly acknowledge that they "*were* Children of wrath," may with adoring gratitude assure themselves, that they are so no longer. But let them never forget what they were, or what obligations they owe to that grace of God which has delivered them. Hear how strongly St. Paul inculcates this on those to whom our text was addressed: "We were by nature Children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, of his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ"..... "Wherefore remember," (O beloved Brethren, REMEMBER,) "that at that time ye were without Christ, (oh! think of that!) being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus, ye, who sometimes were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ[s]." Dear Brethren, *remember* this transition; and let every syllable that records it fill your souls with gratitude to your almighty Saviour and Deliverer.]

3. What attention should be shewn to the welfare of the rising generation—

[They are "all by nature Children of wrath:" And should they be left in that awful state? Should no means be used to turn them

[p] Eph. iv. 23.
[q] Eph. ii. 10.
[r] 2 Cor. v. 17.
[s] Eph. ii. 4, 5, 11, 12, 13.

them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God?

O parents, look at your dear offspring; and whilst fondling them in your arms, or delighting in their progress, remember what they are, and cry mightily to God for them night and day. Be not contented with their advancement in bodily strength, or intellectual power, or temporal condition; but seek above all things to behold them turning to God, and growing in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let all your plans for them have respect to this one point, the changing of them from children of wrath to children of the living God.

Let those also who have the care of children[t] endeavour to get their own minds impressed with the thought, that their office is not so much to convey instruction in worldly knowledge, as to lead the souls of the children to Christ, that they may be partakers of his salvation: and let them engage in their work with hearts full of tender compassion to their scholars, and of zeal for God.

And, my dear Children, let me address also a few words to you. Think me not unkind if I remind you of what you are by nature. If I speak to you as children of wrath, it is not to wound your feelings, but to stir you up to improve the opportunities that are afforded you for attaining a better and a happier state. What would you do, my dear Children, if you were shut up in a house that was on fire, and a number of benevolent persons were exerting themselves to rescue you from the devouring element? would you not strive which should first be partakers of the benefit? Know then, that this is a just representation of your state: you are children of wrath, and are in danger of dwelling with everlasting burnings: and the object of your instructors is, to shew you how you may flee from the wrath to come. Oh, listen to their instructions with all possible care; treasure up in your minds all their exhortations and advice; and beg of God, that through those Scriptures which they explain to you, you may be made wise unto salvation by faith in Christ Jesus.]

[t] If this be the subject of a Sermon for *Sunday Schools* or *Charity Schools*, the Instructors in particular may be here addressed.

MXXI.

SALVATION BY GRACE NOT HOSTILE TO GOOD WORKS.

Eph. ii. 8—10. *By grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has ordained that we should walk in them.*

ALL

ALL God's works, of whatever kind they be, are designed to praise him. His works of creation proclaim his wisdom and his power: his works of providence display his goodness: his works of redemption magnify his grace. It is of these last that the Apostle is speaking in the preceding context, even of all that God has done for us in the Son of his love; and he declares that it was all done, "that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus." The Gospel is too rarely viewed in this light: it is by many scarcely distinguished from the law; being considered rather as a code of laws enforced with penalties, than as an exhibition of mercies confirmed with promises. But it is as an exhibition of mercy only that we ought to view it; precisely as it is set forth in the words before us: from which we shall take occasion to shew,

I. That salvation is altogether of grace—

By "salvation" I understand the whole work of grace, whether as revealed in the word, or as experienced in the soul: and it is altogether of grace:

1. It is so—

[Trace it to its first origin, when the plan of it was fixed in the council of peace between the Father and the Son[a]: Who devised it? who merited it? who desired it? It was the fruit of God's sovereign grace, and of grace alone. Trace it in all its parts;—the gift of God's only-begotten Son to be our Surety and Substitute; the acceptance of his vicarious sacrifice in our behalf; and the revelation of that mystery in the written word: Who will arrogate to himself the honour of having acquired these, or of having contributed to the acquisition of them in the smallest degree?

It may be thought perhaps, that, because an interest in these things is obtained by faith, we may claim some honour on account of the faith which apprehends them; which, being exercised by us, may be considered in some respects as giving us a ground of glorying before God. But this also is the gift of God, no less than the plan of salvation itself: it is not in any man by nature; nor is it to be wrought in man by any human power: it is not the effect of reasoning: for then the acutest reasoners would be the strongest believers; which is frequently far from being the case: it is solely the gift of God: and hence they who have believed, are said to "have believed through grace[b]." It is expressly said to be given

[a] Zech. vi. 13. [b] Acts xviii. 27.

given us[c]: and when Peter declared his faith in Jesus as the true Messiah, Jesus said to him, "Flesh and blood had not revealed this truth unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." This is the true reason why many believed the testimony of Christ and his Apostles, whilst others were hardened in unbelief: those "whose hearts God opened," as he did Lydia's, received the truth; whilst all others treated the word, either with open scorn, or secret indifference.]

2. It must be so—

[Salvation must either be of grace or of works: the two cannot be mixed together, or reconciled with each other: if it be of works in any degree, it is no more of grace[d]; and in whatever degree it is of works, it so far affords us an occasion of boasting; seeing that it is then a debt paid, and not a gift bestowed[e].

To avoid this conclusion, some will say, that salvation may be of works, and still be also of grace; because the works being wrought in us by God, he is entitled to all the glory of them. But, granting that they are wrought in us by God, yet, inasmuch as they are *our* works, they afford us a ground of glorying: and, to say that they do not afford us a ground of glorying, is directly to contradict the Apostle in our text, where he says, "It is not of works, lest any man should boast." The same Apostle elsewhere says, "It is of faith, that it may be by grace[f]:" from both which passages it is evident, that, if it be of works, from whatever source those works proceed, it can no longer be by grace.

But here it may be asked, 'If works, notwithstanding they are wrought in us by God, afford us a ground of glorying in ourselves, does not faith afford us the same ground of glorying?' I answer, No: for it is of the very nature of faith to renounce all hope in ourselves, and to found our hopes solely on the merits of another: it disclaims all glorying in self, and gives all the glory to him from whom it derives its blessings. In this it differs essentially from every other work: other works, though wrought in us by God, bring a glory to ourselves; but this, of necessity, transfers to God all the glory resulting from its exercise; and, consequently, neither does, nor can, nor desires to, arrogate any thing to itself.

Thus we hope that the point is clear,—salvation is altogether of grace from first to last. The plan of salvation as originally devised, the Saviour who wrought it out for us, the acceptance of his vicarious sacrifice in our behalf, and the faith whereby we are made partakers of his sacrifice, are all the gifts of free and sovereign grace: the foundation and the superstructure are wholly of grace: and, "when the head-stone shall be brought forth, it must be with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it[g]!"]

If

[c] Phil. i. 29. [d] Rom. xi. 6. [e] Rom. iv. 4.
[f] Rom. iv. 16. [g] Zech. iv. 7.

If to this it be objected, that by such doctrines we subvert the very foundations of morality, we answer,

II. That, though good works are wholly excluded from all share in the office of justifying the soul, yet is the performance of them effectually secured—

Believers are "the workmanship of God" altogether, as much as the world itself is: and as the world was created by Christ Jesus, so are they "created anew in Christ Jesus." But we are "created *unto good works*, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them."

The concluding words of our text shew us,

1. That God has ordained good works as the path wherein we are to walk—

[This is an unquestionable truth: the whole of the moral law demonstrates it: every promise, every threatening in the whole Bible attests it. Not a word can be found in the whole Sacred Volume, that dispenses with the performance of good works: on the contrary, it is expressly said, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The least idea of reaching heaven in any other path, is invariably reprobated as a most fatal delusion. The means and the end are indissolubly connected in the councils of heaven[h]: and to hope that they shall ever be separated, is to deceive and ruin our own souls. If we are not careful to maintain good works, we entirely counteract all the purposes of God in his Gospel, and cut ourselves off from all hope of salvation[i].]

2. That God has prepared and fitted his people to walk in them[k]—

[He has given to his people a new nature, and infused into their souls a new and heavenly principle, by which they "have passed from death unto life." They have received from Christ "that living water, which is in them as a well of water springing up unto everlasting life[l]." They can no more sin in the way they did before[m]. Under the influence of the Holy Ghost, they move in a new direction, affecting the things of the Spirit, as formerly they affected the things of the flesh[n]. They are *created* in Christ Jesus *unto* good works; and the impulse given them in this new creation they obey. The metaphor here used, may, if not pressed too far, illustrate the matter, and set it in a clear point of view. God, when he created the heavenly bodies, appointed them their respective paths in the regions of space. To each he gave its proper

[h] 2 Thess. ii. 13.
[i] Tit. ii. 4—8. (Mark the 8th verse especially.)
[k] This perhaps is, of the two, the more exact sense of the original.
[l] John iv. 14. [m] 1 John iii. 9. [n] Rom. viii. 1—5. & Gal. v. 17.

proper impulse, having previously fitted it for the performance of the revolutions assigned it: and in their respective orbits he has ever since upheld them, so that they all without exception fulfil the ends for which they were created. Thus in the new creation, God has appointed to all their destined course through the vast expanse of moral and religious duty. He has also, at the time of its new creation, given to each soul the impulse necessary for it, together with all the qualities and dispositions proper for the regulation of its motions according to his will: and he yet further, by his continual, though invisible, agency, preserves them in their appointed way[o]. But further than this the metaphor must not be pressed: for the heavenly bodies have neither consciousness nor volition; but we have both: they too carry with them nothing that can cause an aberration from their destined course; whereas we have innumerable impediments, both within and without: hence they fulfil their destinies without the smallest intermission; whilst we, alas! deviate from the path assigned us in instances without number. Still however, in the event, the purposes of God are at last accomplished, as with them, so with us also: and, notwithstanding, in the estimation of a self-righteous Pharisee, the chief reason for performing good works is taken away, yet are they performed, and shall be performed by every one that has "received the grace of God in truth."]

OBSERVE then from hence,

1. What need we have of humility—

[The pride of the human heart can never endure the doctrines of grace. So tenacious are men of every thing that may give them a ground of glorying in themselves, that they will rather perish in their own righteousness, than submit to be saved by the righteousness of another[p]? But, Brethren, you must submit. God will not condescend to your terms. It is in vain to contest the matter with him: it is folly, it is madness, so to do. You know full well, that the fallen angels have no claim on God for mercy; and what have you more than they? But God, who has passed by the angels, has given a Saviour to you, yea, and salvation too, if you will receive it as a gift of grace. Let it not be a hard matter with you to accept the proffered benefit. Would the fallen angels, think you, refuse it, if a tender of it were made to them? O then, prostrate yourselves before your God, as deserving nothing but wrath; and let him glorify in you the unsearchable riches of his grace!]

2. The vast importance of faith—

[It

[o] Men fit themselves for perdition: but it is God alone who fits any for glory. See Rom. ix. 23. where the same word is used as in the text. See also Isai. xxvi. 12.

[p] Rom. ix. 30—33. & x. 3.

[It is by faith alone that you can apprehend the Saviour, or be made partakers of his benefits. You must "be saved by grace, *through faith.*" Your whole life must be a life of faith, according to what St. Paul has said, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." But this faith you must receive from above. You can neither come to Christ, nor know Christ, except as you are taught and drawn by the Father[q]. Pray to him, saying, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief." Pray also to him to "increase your faith" yet more and more: for it is only by being strong in faith that you will approve yourselves to God, or abound, as you ought, in all the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory.]

3. What obligations lie upon you to serve and glorify your God—

[Be it so; You are not to be saved by good works: but is there no other motive that you can find for the performance of them? Do you feel no obligation to Him who sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that you might live through him? When you know that God has "ordained that you should walk in the daily exercise of good works," have you no desire to please him? And when you know that this is the only path in which it is possible for you ever to arrive at your Father's house, will you wilfully turn aside from it? If gratitude will not constrain you, will you be insensible to fear? But further, it is by your works that men will judge of your principles: and, though they represent the doctrines of grace as leading to licentiousness, they will expect to see you more holy than others; and if they are disappointed in this, they will cast the blame upon your principles, and upon the Gospel itself. Will you then put a stumbling-block in the way of others, and cause "the name of your God and Saviour to be blasphemed?" No: "you have not so learned Christ, if so be ye have heard him and been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus." See then that ye abound in every good word and work; and "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well-doing."]

[q] Matt. xi. 27. John vi. 65.

MXXII.

THE STATES OF THE REGENERATE AND THE UNREGENERATE CONTRASTED.

Eph. ii. 12, 13. *Ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now, in Christ Jesus, ye, who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*

THERE

THERE is scarcely any thing which has a greater tendency to impress our minds with exalted views of the grace of God, than to compare the guilt and misery of an unconverted state, with the purity and happiness into which we are brought by the Gospel of Christ. As a shipwrecked person, viewing the tempest from a rock on which he has been cast, feels a solemn and grateful sense of the mercy vouchsafed unto him; so surely must every one, who "looks unto the rock whence he has been hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence he has been digged," stand amazed at the Divine goodness, and be quickened to pour out his soul in grateful adorations. To produce this frame, is the scope of the whole preceding part of this Epistle, wherein the Apostle extols and magnifies the grace of God, as manifested to his redeemed people. Having shewn what their state had been previous to conversion, and contrasted it with that to which they are introduced by the Gospel, he exhorts them to bear it in remembrance: "Wherefore *remember;*" remember what ye *were*, that ye may be thankful for what ye *are*[a].

We propose to shew,

I. The state of unregenerate men—

The state of the Jews and Gentiles represented in a very lively manner the condition of persons under the Gospel: the external privileges of the Jews, typifying the internal and spiritual privileges of the regenerate; and the abhorred state of the Gentiles marking with equal clearness the ignorance and misery of the unregenerate. In this view, what the Apostle says of the Ephesians, previous to their conversion to Christianity, may be considered as applicable to all at this day, who are not truly and savingly converted:

1. They are "without Christ"—

[The Gentiles, of course, had no knowledge of, nor any interest in, the Lord Jesus Christ. And thus it is with the unregenerate amongst ourselves: they are without Christ[b]; they are separated from him as branches cut off from the vine: they do not depend upon him, or receive sap and nutriment from him. They indeed call themselves Christians; but they have no union with Christ, nor any communications from him.]

2. They

[a] ver. 11. with the text. [b] χωρὶς Χριστοῦ. Compare John xv. 5.

2. They are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel"—

[Israel are called a commonwealth, because they were governed by laws different from all other people, and possessed privileges unknown to the rest of the world. Thus the true Israel at this day may be considered in the same light; because they, and they only, acknowledge Christ as their governor; they alone yield obedience to *his* laws; and they alone enjoy the privileges of his people. Now as the Gentiles were "aliens" from the commonwealth of the Jews, so are all unconverted men "aliens" from the commonwealth of the converted. They are governed by different laws; following the customs, fashions, and erroneous maxims of the world: they are separated from them in heart and affection; and though, from necessity, they must sometimes have intercourse with the godly, they never unite with them as one people, or desire to have one lot together with them.]

3. They are "strangers from the covenants of promise"—

[There is, strictly speaking, but *one* covenant of grace: but the Apostle speaks of it in the plural number; because it was given at different times, and always with increasing fulness and perspicuity. Whether given to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, or to Moses, it was always the same: only the promises annexed to it were more copious and explicit. It is called the covenant of promise," to distinguish it from the covenant of works, which consisted only in requirements; whereas this consists chiefly in promises: under the covenant of works, men were to *do* all; under the covenant of grace they were to *receive* all.

It is obvious that the Gentiles were "strangers" to this covenant: and though it is not alike obvious, it is equally true, that the unconverted are strangers to it also. We confess they are admitted into the external bond of it in their baptism: but they do not become partakers of the promised blessings till they sue for them in the exercise of faith and prayer. And we will venture to appeal to the generality of baptized persons, Whether they are not as much strangers to the covenant of promise, as if no such covenant existed? Do they rest upon the promises? Do they treasure them up in their minds? Do they plead them in prayer before God? Do they found all their hopes of happiness upon them? Alas! they have little acquaintance with the nature of the covenant, and no submission to its terms: and consequently they are utter strangers to the covenant, and to the promises contained in it.]

4. They are without hope—

[The Gentile world are always represented as in a hopeless state; and though we presume not to say, that God will not extend

extend uncovenanted mercy to any, yet we have no warrant to *affirm* that he will. If indeed they *perfectly* fulfilled the law written in their hearts, there is reason to think God would have mercy on them[c]: but who amongst them does *perfectly* fulfil that law? But, waving this, there is an absolute certainty that the state of unconverted men under the Gospel is hopeless: no mercy can possibly be extended to them, if they continue unconverted: they must inevitably and eternally perish. For, how should they have any hope, when they are "without Christ," (who is the Head of all vital influence;) and "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel," (to which alone any saving blessings are communicated;) and "strangers from the covenant of promise," (which is the only channel by which those blessings are conveyed to us? From whence then can they derive any hope? or what foundation can they have for it?]

5. They are "without God in the world"—

[The gods of the Heathen were no gods: therefore they to whom the God of Israel was unknown, were "without God in the world." And thus it is with the unconverted amongst ourselves: for though they acknowledge the being of a God, they know not what a just and holy God he is; nor do they glorify him as God, by a conformity to his revealed will. They love not to hear of him: they endeavour to blot out the remembrance of him from their minds: their whole conduct accords with that of Pharaoh, when he said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go[d]." In a word, the language of their hearts is like that of the fool whom David speaks of, "No God;" there is no God to control or punish me; or, if there be, I wish there were none[e].]

But that all do not continue in that deplorable condition, will appear by considering,

II. The state to which they are introduced by the Gospel—

Every living man once was in the state above described; but in conversion, men "who were sometimes afar off, are made nigh to God"—

[In what the nearness of converted men to God consists, will appear by the very same considerations as have already been used to illustrate their distance from him in their unconverted state. The Gentiles had no liberty of access to God among the Jews: they had an outer court assigned them: and it would have been at the peril of their lives, if they had presumed to enter the place appropriated to the Jews. But on conversion to Judaism, they were admitted to a participation of all the rights and privileges of the

[c] Rom. ii. 26, 27. [d] Exod. v. 2. [e] Ps. xiv. 1.

the Jews themselves. Thus persons truly converted to God have liberty to approach the Majesty of heaven: yea, since the veil of the Temple was rent in twain, a new and living way is opened for them into the holiest of all: they may go even to the throne of God, and draw nigh to him as their reconciled God and Father. As soon as ever they are "in Christ Jesus," united to him by faith, and interested in his merits, they have every privilege which the most eminent saints enjoy: their sins are pardoned; they have peace with God; and, though they may not be so full of joy as others, yet they have the same grounds of joy, inasmuch as "their Beloved is theirs, and they are his."]

To this happy state they are brought "by the blood of Christ"—

[It was the blood of the sacrifice that availed for the restoration of sinners to the Divine favour under the law: and in the same manner it is the blood of Christ, and that only, that can avail for us. But as in the former case, so also in this, two things are necessary: the blood must be *shed* as an atonement for sin; and it must be *sprinkled* on the offender himself, to intimate his entire affiance in it. Now the shedding of Christ's blood was effected on Calvary, many hundred years ago: and that one offering is sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world. Nothing more therefore is wanting to reconcile us to the Deity. But the sprinkling of his blood upon our hearts and consciences must be done by every one for himself: we must, as it were, dip the hyssop in the blood, and apply it to our own souls: or, in other words, we must exercise faith on the atonement of Christ as the only ground of our acceptance before God. In this way, and in this only, are we ever brought to a state of favour with God, and of fellowship with his people.]

This subject being mentioned as that which was deserving of continual remembrance, we would call upon you to "REMEMBER" it—

1. As a criterion whereby to judge of your state—

[It is evident, that, if once we were afar off from God, and now we are nigh to him, there must have been a transition from the one state to the other, or, as the Scripture expresses it, a "passing from death unto life." Has this transition then ever taken place in your souls? It is not necessary that you should be able to trace the precise time when it began, and the various steps by which it was accomplished: but there is an impossibility for it to have taken place, without your having sought it humbly, and laboured for it diligently. Have you then *this* evidence at least that it has been accomplished? If not, you can have no reason to think that you have ever yet experienced the change, which characterizes all who are made heirs of salvation.]

2. As

2. As a ground of humiliation—

[If you were the most eminent saint that ever lived, it would be well to bear in mind what you once were, and what you would still have been, if Divine grace had not wrought a change within you. Look then at those who "are afar off;" and, when you see their alienation from God, their enmity against his people, their distance from even a hope of salvation, behold your own image, and be confounded on account of your past abominations: yea, "walk softly also before God all the days of your life," in the recollection, that, as that once was your state, so it would be again, if the grace that originally interposed to change you, do not continually maintain that change in your souls.]

3. As a source of gratitude and joy—

[It is scarcely needful to say, that they who have experienced a restoration to God's favour, should bless and magnify their Benefactor and Redeemer. But have not those also, who are at the greatest distance from God, reason to rejoice and sing? Yes surely; for they may look at those who are now in heaven, and say, "The blood which availed to bring them nigh to God will also avail for me." O joyful thought! Ponder it in your hearts, ye careless sinners: consider what the Lord Jesus Christ is both able and willing to do for *you*. Every saint, whether on earth or in heaven, was once in your state; and if you will seek remission through the blood of Christ, you shall be partakers of their privileges, both in this world and in the world to come.]

MXXIII.

THE EXALTED PRIVILEGES OF TRUE CHRISTIANS.

Eph. ii. 19—22. *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone: in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

IT is well for Christians to contemplate their high privileges. But, in order to estimate them aright, it is necessary that they should bear in mind the state in which they were, previous to their embracing the Gospel. The difference between the Jews and Gentiles was great; yet scarcely greater than that between the nominal and the real Christian. The nominal Christian, though

though possessed of many external advantages, is, with respect to the spiritual enjoyment of them, on a level with the Heathen; or rather, I should say, below the Heathen, inasmuch as his abuse of those advantages has entailed upon him the deeper guilt. We may therefore apply to the unconverted Christians what St. Paul speaks of the Ephesians in their unconverted state; "They are without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world[a]." From this state however they are delivered, as soon as they truly believe in Christ. They are then, as my text expresses it, "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." The exalted state to which they are brought is represented by the Apostle under two distinct metaphors: they are made,

I. The people of God, amongst whom he dwells—

They are "fellow-citizens with the saints"—

[Bodies that are incorporated, whether in cities, boroughs, or societies of any kind, have their peculiar privileges, to which others who belong not to them are not entitled. Thus it is with the saints, who are formed into one body in Christ, and have the most distinguished privileges confirmed to them by a charter from the court of heaven. That charter is the Gospel, in which all their immunities and all their claims are fully described. What *externally* belonged to the Jewish nation at large, is *internally* and *spiritually* made over to them: "to them belong the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises[b]:" yes, all that God has revealed in his Gospel, all that he has promised to his believing people, all that he has engaged to them in his everlasting covenant, all that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob enjoyed on earth, and all that they now possess in heaven, all without exception is theirs; "All things are theirs, when they are Christ's." They are "citizens of no mean city," seeing that "they are come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God[c]:" and whatever pertains to that is the lot of their inheritance.]

They are also "of the household of God"—

[As in the days of old there was an outer court for the Gentiles, and an inner court into which the native servants and children of Jehovah were privileged to enter, so now Believers have

[a] ver. 12. [b] Rom. ix. 4. [c] Heb. xii. 22.

have access to God as his more immediate children and servants. They go in and out before him with a liberty unknown to the natural man; they hear his voice; they enjoy his protection; they subsist from day to day by the provision which he assigns them: the family to which they belong comprehends "an innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in heaven," together with myriads who are yet on their way to Zion: but all regard him as their common Head, their Lord, their Master, their Father, and their Friend.]

Exalted as this privilege is, it is far surpassed by that which is contained under that other metaphor,

II. The Temple wherein he dwells—

The whole body of true Believers is the Temple of the living God—

[Their foundation properly is Christ. But, in the text, the Church is said to be "built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets," because they with one voice testified of Christ; and on their testimony the Church is built. This is the import of what our Saviour said to Peter; "Thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build my Church:" he did not mean, that he would build it on *the person* of Peter, but on *the testimony* of Peter just before delivered, namely, that "Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God[d]." Of the Church, Christ is also "the chief corner-stone," which, whilst it supports the building, connects the parts of it together, and gives it stability through the whole remaining superstructure.

The building raised on this foundation consists of "living stones[e]," all selected by sovereign grace, and with unerring wisdom "fitly framed together," so as mutually to confirm and strengthen one another, and collectively to constitute an edifice for the Lord. Various degrees of labour are bestowed on these, according to the situation they are to occupy. Some, which are designed for a more conspicuous place in that building, have many strokes: others, which have a less honourable place assigned them, are sooner and more easily brought to the measure of perfection which is necessary for them.

But, in all, this work is carried on silently, and in a way unnoticed by the world around them. As in the temple of Solomon, "every stone was made ready before it was brought thither, so that there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was in building[f];" so it is in this spiritual building: every stone is fitted in secret: the work is carried on in each, without attracting the notice and observation of men: but all will at last be found so precisely fitted for their respective stations,

[d] Mat. xvi. 16—18. [e] 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5 [f] 1 Kin. vi. 7.

tions, as to demonstrate the infinite skill and unerring wisdom of the divine Architect.]

The end for which this structure is raised, is, the inhabitation of the Deity—

[For this end fresh converts are "added to the Church daily, even such as shall be saved." For this end the work is carried on and perfected in the heart of every individual Believer. For this end all the means of grace, like the scaffolding, are continued, till the whole shall have received its final completion. For this end the Holy Spirit is imparted to all, so that all are compacted together, standing firm on the one foundation, and united to each other by indissoluble bonds. And at last the Deity shall take possession of it, as he did in the days of Solomon, when by the bright cloud he filled the house, so that the priests could no longer stand to minister before him[g].

In all this honour every saint partakes. Every one, even in his individual capacity, is a temple of the Lord[h], and has the Spirit of God dwelling in him[i]. "In his heart Christ dwells by faith[k]:" and, through the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit, "he grows continually, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Yes, this honour has the Church at large; and this honour have all the saints of every successive age.]

REFLECTIONS—

1. How thankful should we be for such inestimable privileges!

["Believers, whoever ye are, ye were once lying in the quarry, as insensible as any that are still there. It was not by any agency of yours, no, nor for any superior goodness in you, that ye were taken thence; but purely by God's power, for the praise of the glory of his own grace. He it is that has made the difference between you and others, between you also and your former selves. Oh! "look unto the rock, whence ye have been hewn, and to the hole of the pit, whence ye have been digged." Never forget what ye once were, or what ye would still have continued to be, if God, of his own good pleasure, had not brought you thence, and made you what ye now are.

Be thankful also for the means which God, of his own infinite mercy, is yet using with you, to carry on and perfect his work in your souls. If ye have many strokes of the hammer, complain not of it: you have not one too many, not one that could be spared, if you are to occupy aright the place ordained for you. Lie meekly and submissively before your God; and let him perfect his work in his own way.

And contemplate the end for which you are destined, even "to be

[g] 1 Kin. viii. 10, 11. [h] 1 Cor. vi. 19.
[i] John xiv. 17, 23. [k] Eph. iii. 17.

be an habitation of God, through the Spirit," to all eternity! Shall not this prospect make you "joyful in all your tribulation?" Shall so much as an hour pass, and you not give praise and thanksgiving to your God? Look forward to the end, even to "this grace that shall be given you at the appearing of Jesus Christ;" and beg of your God and Saviour not to intermit his work one single moment, till you are rendered completely meet for the station you are to hold, and the honour you are to enjoy in the eternal world.]

2. How studious should we be to walk worthy of them!

[This improvement of our privileges we should never overlook: it is the use which the Inspired Writers continually teach us to make of them. Are we the temples of the Holy Ghost? we must be far removed from all connexion with ungodly men[l] ——— and from all hateful and polluting passions[m] ——— And in us must be offered up continually the sacrifices of prayer and praise[n]; from which "God will smell a sweet odour," and by which he will eternally be glorified. Surely "holiness becomes God's house for ever;" and "this is the law of the house," that every part of it, and its very precincts, even to "its utmost limits, should be holy[o]." Labour then for this. Consider "what manner of persons ye ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness:" and, as every vessel of the sanctuary was holy, so let your every action, your every word, your every thought, be such as becometh your high calling and your heavenly destination.]

[l] 2 Cor. vi. 16, 17.
[m] 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.
[n] 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.
[o] Ezek. xliii. 12.

MXXIV.

THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST.

Eph. iii. 8. *Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.*

IT is generally imagined that distinguished favours conferred upon us by the Deity will generate pride and self-conceit. This is certainly the tendency of elevation and distinction among men; but the very reverse is the case with those whom God delights to honour; because, with the exaltation, he always gives proportionable self-knowledge and humility. St. Paul was a chosen vessel, destined, from his mother's womb, to be God's

God's messenger to the Gentile world. But before he could be employed on this embassy, God struck him to the ground, and, together with the prostration of his body, produced a correspondent humiliation in his soul. From that time no language was sufficiently strong to express the full sense which he entertained of his own unworthiness. He therefore coined a word for the purpose; and, at the very time when he was speaking of his high commission as the Apostle of the Gentiles, made use of it, in order to convey the low idea which he had of his own state and attainments: "Unto me, who am *less than the least* of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

It is not our intention to dwell any longer on the views which the Apostle had of his own character, but to shew,

I. The subject-matter of his preaching—

There was one great topic common to all the Apostles, a topic to which all others were subordinate, and subservient; and this was, Jesus Christ. Hence "the preaching of Christ," and "the preaching of Jesus," were the common expressions to denote the scope of their ministry[a]. And so insignificant did every other subject appear in the eyes of St. Paul, that "he determined to know nothing among the people, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified[b]." His constant employment was, to represent Christ to them as,

1. The appointed Saviour—

[In all his Epistles he constantly speaks of Christ as the Son of God, who, though equal to the Father in respect of his Godhead, was yet sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world. He informs us, that God from all eternity gave him a people, who should be to him for an inheritance for ever: that, in due time, he justifies them for his sake, and "accepts them in him," and constitutes him their living Head, and causes them to receive all needful supplies out of his fulness. He declares, that this Jesus has already executed the work assigned him; and that having died and risen again, he is carrying on his work in heaven; and will

[a] Compare Acts iii. 20. & viii. 5, 35. & ix. 20. & xvii. 18. & 1 Cor. xv. 12. & 2 Cor. xi. 4. & Phil. i. 18.

[b] 1 Cor. ii. 2.

will carry it on, till every one of his elect shall be safely gathered around his throne[c].]

2. The only Saviour—

[On this point no Apostle was more cautious or more jealous than St. Paul. In his Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, he shews the impossibility of our being justified by the deeds of the law; since, having once violated the law, we are all condemned by it, and consequently cannot be justified by it: for it is obvious, that the same law which condemns us for disobedience, can never justify us for our obedience. He goes further still, and shews that nothing of our own can contribute towards our justification; and that, if we do not trust in Christ *alone* for our acceptance, we shall in vain hope to obtain mercy[d]. Yea, so strenuous is he in establishing this fundamental truth, that he denounces a curse on any man whatever, or even on an angel from heaven, if he shall presume to maintain any principle in opposition to it[e].]

3. An all-sufficient Saviour—

[In speaking of Christ, he never intimates the smallest doubt whether there be any want of sufficiency in him, either for Jews or Gentiles; for the most profligate, any more than for the most decent of mankind. He represents his one offering of himself upon the cross as commensurate with all the demands of God, and all the necessities of man: nor does he hesitate to affirm, that "he is able to save *to the uttermost* ALL that come unto God by him[f]."]

Such being the uniform subject of his preaching, we shall proceed to open,

II. The unsearchable riches contained in it—

The very term "unsearchable," shews how incapable any finite Being is of doing justice to this subject: yet we know enough of it to fill us with everlasting wonder and amazement. Let us notice then,

1. The riches of wisdom contained in it—

[Man having fallen, every perfection of the Deity required his eternal condemnation. *Justice* required the execution of the law. *Holiness* demanded that God should shew his indignation against sin. *Truth* called for the accomplishment of the threatening, which God had denounced as the penalty of transgression. The whole universe seemed to call for the punishment of man, that the Governor of it might not be dishonoured, nor its order disturbed.

What

[c] See 1 Cor. xv. 3, 4, 22.
[d] Gal. v. 2, 4.
[e] Gal. i. 8, 9. What *energy* in the repetition!
[f] Heb. vii. 25.

What now could be done? What scope was there for the exercise of mercy? Who could contrive a way wherein the perfections of God should be made to harmonize with the salvation of man? If all the angels in heaven had sat in council to deliberate, how could they ever have found out an expedient suited to the case? Supposing that some had suggested the idea of an atonement, yet where could they have found one capable of making satisfaction for the sins of an apostate world? The guilt contracted was of infinite malignity, and therefore required an infinite atonement. But who amongst them all, supposing him willing to offer himself, could present to God such an offering as this? They were all finite; and therefore, if all were united in one common cause, their labours or sufferings could only be finite and limited. Could any of them have entertained the thought of God himself becoming a man, and dying in the place of his offending creatures? Could such a proposal ever have been made to God, even supposing the thought to have entered into the mind of some bright Intelligence? The impossibility of any adequate device originating with the creature, is plain and obvious.

But behold the unsearchable riches of Divine wisdom! God himself was pleased to interpose; and by the appointment of his only dear Son to die for us, has not only made all his perfections to harmonize in our redemption, but has added a lustre to every perfection which it could not have possessed in any other way. Christ being God equal with the Father, every thing he either did, or suffered, had an infinite value. By his atonement therefore, *Justice* was satisfied, because the debt due from man was discharged by that Divine Surety. *Holiness* was displayed, in that the evil and malignity of sin was fully marked in the sufferings of Jesus. *Truth* was kept inviolate, because the threatening was executed on him who stood in our place. Thus "mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissed each other[ff]." The *law* of God was even magnified and made honourable in a far higher degree than it ever could have been, if its injunctions had never been transgressed, or its penalties had been inflicted on the whole human race; because the Lawgiver himself obeyed its injunctions, and endured its penalties. Nay further, through the intervention of this Saviour, every perfection of the Deity *demands* the salvation of believing penitents; and they who confide in Jesus, may plead for mercy upon the footing of Truth and Justice; and may request, that, because God is just to his Son, and true to his word, he will justify them from all their iniquities[g].

And must we not now exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of the *wisdom* and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out[h]!" Is it without reason that Christ is called "the power of God, and the *wisdom* of

[ff] Ps. lxxxv. 10. [g] Rom. iii. 26. 1 John i. 9. [h] Rom. xi. 33.

of God[i]?" or, that "in this mystery all the treasures of *wisdom* and knowledge are said to be contained[k]?"]

2. The riches of love contained in it—

[Let us suppose that God, willing to display "the exceeding riches of his grace[l]" and love, called a sinner into his presence, and, enduing him with wisdom beyond the limits of a finite capacity, had pledged himself to give precisely such a Saviour as he should ask. Let us suppose the sinner standing before him, and preferring his petitions to his condescending God[ll]:

'My God, since thou permittest me, who am but dust and ashes, to ask for such a Saviour as I want, I would solicit that he shall be nothing less than *God* himself; for if he be less than God, he will never be suited to my necessities.'—'Sinner, thou hast asked a great thing: but it shall be unto thee according to thy word: thy Saviour shall be "God over all blessed for ever[m]."' 'But, O my God, if I may presume to ask again, I would desire that he should be *man* also, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh; because I shall then feel a nearness to him, and a confidence before him.'—'What hast thou asked? that he should be God, and yet man? But the word is gone out of my mouth, and I will not revoke it: he shall be "God manifest in the flesh[n]."' 'O be not angry, and I will ask yet again: Let him *do some great thing* for me, to convince me of his love.'—'He shall: he shall divest himself of all the glory of heaven, and assume your nature in the lowest state of degradation[o].'' 'But may I ask also, that he should *suffer some great thing* for me? I should find it then impossible to doubt his love.'—'He shall also suffer for thee: he shall be "wounded for your transgressions, and bruised for your iniquities," and shall pour out his soul unto death under the load of all your guilt[p].'' 'But, O my God, if thou wilt not be displeased with me, I would ask that my Saviour should *be always with me*, to support and comfort me wherever I am.'—'It shall be so: he shall be "with thee always, even to the end of the world[q]."' 'Yet, O my God, I could not be satisfied, if I did not know that he was *always with thee also:* for if I had not him for my Advocate with thee, I should be afraid that my daily infirmities would cause thine anger to break forth against me.'—'Well, in this also thou shalt be gratified: he shall sit at my right hand, and "ever live there, on purpose to make intercession for thee[r]."' 'But'—'What, Sinner, art thou not yet satisfied? wilt

[i] 1 Cor. i. 24.
[k] Col. ii. 2, 3. ἐν ᾧ, *in which*. See also Eph. iii. 9, 10.
[l] Eph. ii. 7.
[ll] This idea is perfectly Scriptural, 1 Kin. iii. 5. John xiv. 13, 14. & xv. 7. & xvi. 23, 24. with Gen. xviii. 23—32.
[m] Rom. ix. 5. [n] 1 Tim. iii. 16. [o] Phil. ii. 6—8.
[p] Isai. liii. 4—12. [q] Matt. xxviii. 20.
[r] Heb. iv. 14, 15, & vii. 25. & John ii. 1.

wilt thou proceed to ask any thing more?'—'O my God, thou hast commanded me to ask, and, if it might not displease thee, I would ask something further for the comfort and security of my perishing soul. O if the person appointed for my Saviour might *have the government of the whole universe committed to his hands!* I should know then, that neither men nor devils could ever hurt me, and that my wants should be all supplied continually.'—'Thou hast asked a great thing indeed, That I should resign my government into his hands! But I will do so from love to thee; and he shall manage all things in heaven and earth, as long as there shall remain one sinner who shall need his care and protection[s]. Surely thou art now satisfied?' 'O my God, I fear to offend thee: but my eternal happiness is at stake, and therefore I would neglect nothing that can tend to insure it: O that there might be *an identity of interests between the Saviour and myself!* for he would never suffer any one to rob him of his property; and in the security of that, I myself should be secure.' —'Thou hast asked well: thy soul shall be his property[t], his purchased possession[u], his peculiar treasure[x]: and therefore thou mayest rest assured, that "none shall ever pluck thee out of his hand[y]." 'Be not angry, O Lord, and I will ask but this once: there is yet one thing more which my soul desireth; and without which all thy other marvellous concessions would lose much of their value: only grant this, and I can ask no more: Let my Saviour *be my Judge*: for then, in that great and terrible day, I shall stand with boldness amidst the wreck of worlds: I shall be sure that no accuser can prevail against me; because the Judge himself will bear witness that I am his, and will claim me as his portion and heritage for ever.'—'Thou art an Israelite indeed, and hast pleaded well: I will not refuse thee this also: thy Saviour shall be thy Judge[z], that thou mayest have confidence before him, at his coming[a].'

Now, Brethren, consider the riches of God's love, and say, whether they be not "unsearchable?" Say, whether "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of it, be not utterly incomprehensible[b]?" The love he shews the angels, is not to be compared with this: nor, if he had restored your souls to happiness without such an atonement, would his love have deserved a thought in comparison of this. The gift of his only dear Son, not only transcends, but altogether eclipses every other mercy.]

INFER,

1. What an honourable and blessed office is that of the Ministry!—

[Was it a marvellous grace conferred on Paul, to be a preacher

[s] Eph. i. 22. with 1 Cor. xv. 25, 28.
[t] Mal. iii. 17.
[u] Eph. i. 14.
[x] Exod. xix. 5.
[y] John x. 28, 29.
[z] Acts xvii. 31.
[a] 1 John ii. 28.
[b] Eph. iii. 18, 19.

preacher to the Gentiles? Surely it is an unspeakable grace to us also, to be employed in preaching unto sinners, though with less endowments, and in a narrower sphere. But what does this office suppose? It supposes that we are acquainted with "the unsearchable riches of Christ," and that we occupy ourselves night and day in unfolding them to others. Here then is an employment which the brightest Seraph before the throne might justly covet, and from which he would derive his highest honours. O that all who are engaged in this office, would determine with the Apostle to "know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified!" Then would "the wilderness soon blossom as the rose;" and, notwithstanding we are in ourselves but earthen vessels, we should enrich thousands of our fellow-creatures with the most invaluable of all treasures [c].]

2. How desirable is it to have a clear knowledge of the Gospel!

[It is in the Gospel only that God has displayed all the wonders of Redemption: and they who have seen the unsearchable riches there exhibited, whatever else they are ignorant of, are wiser than all the philosophers in the universe, whether ancient or modern. Who has such views of God, of his unfathomable wisdom, and his unbounded love? The greatest of all the Prophets, even the Baptist himself, was blind and ignorant in comparison of the meanest Believer. The angels themselves are ever prying into the mysteries of which, in a measure at least, God has revealed to them [d]. Let all of you then, my Brethren, search more and more into the Divine Records: contemplate more and more the mysteries of redeeming love: get a richer sense of it abiding on your souls; and a more transforming influence of it upon your hearts and lives.]

3. How amiable do they appear, in whom high attainments are united with deep humility!

[Who was ever so highly honoured as St. Paul? yet who ever had a deeper sense of his own unworthiness? Thus must it be with us. Has this grace been given to us, to know and to possess the unsearchable riches of Christ? Let us not forget what we were, and what, in ourselves, we still are: yea, the more we know of Christ, and the more we enjoy of his salvation, the lower let us lie before him; and instead of indulging self-preference and self-conceit, let us prefer others in honour before ourselves, and account ourselves less than the least of all saints. Then shall we be lovely in the eyes of all wise and holy men, and especially in the eyes of that God, who "resists the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."]

[c] 2 Cor. iv. 7. [d] 1 Pet. i. 12.

MXXV.

PRAYER THE MEANS OF THE RICHEST BLESSINGS.

Eph. iii. 14—19. *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*

MANY who espouse the cause of religion when it is in flourishing circumstances, are apt to decline from it when their profession exposes them to any great trouble. The Ephesians had heard of Paul's imprisonment at Rome, and were in danger of turning from the faith, through the fear of persecution. St. Paul cautions them against being intimidated by the tribulations which he endured for their sakes; and assures them, that they ought rather to consider it as an honour, that their cause had been so vigorously maintained by him; and that he was suffering persecution for asserting their rights in opposition to the bigoted and blood-thirsty Jews. Precluded as he was from prosecuting his ministerial labours for their good, he spent the more time in prayer for them. This was a liberty of which none could deprive him: yea, rather, the more his body was confined, the more his spirit was enlarged on their behalf. He considered them as members of the same family with all the Church militant and Church triumphant, of which Christ is the Head; and, with the profoundest reverence and humility, he implored for them all those blessings which he desired for himself, and which were suited to their state:

I. The strengthening communications of the Spirit—

[The first blessing which a Child of God would desire, is strength; because he longs as much to execute his Father's will, as he does to enjoy his favour. The occasions on which he needs an increase of strength, are many and urgent. He has many trials to endure; many temptations to withstand; many duties to perform:

perform: and in himself he is sufficient for any one of these things. But "God will give his holy Spirit unto them that ask him." He will "strengthen us in our inner man," so that our wills shall be active, our affections lively, our resolutions firm, our exertions effectual. It is no small measure of "might with which he will strengthen us:" the greater our necessities, the more abundant will be his liberality towards us: he will bestow "according to the riches of his own glory:" so that, if the utmost efforts of omnipotence were necessary for us, they should be put forth in our behalf; and God's own ability should be the measure of his communications.]

II. An abiding sense of Christ's presence—

["The Believer longs to enjoy the presence of God in his soul, because he finds by experience that the "joy of the Lord is his strength." Nor shall he be disappointed of his hope, if he only spread his desires in prayer before God. There is no habitation, not even heaven itself, in which Christ more delights to dwell, than the heart of a Believer. He has promised to "come and make his abode with his people," as he did of old in the Tabernacle and Temple, or as he did in the flesh that he assumed. In them he will exert his power; and to them he will reveal his glory: he will manifest himself to them, as he does not unto the world."

But, in order to bring him into the soul, we must exercise faith. It is faith that apprehends, and pleads his promise: it is faith that brings him down from heaven: it is faith which opens the door of the heart for his admission into it: it is faith which detains him there; and which gives us a realizing sense of his presence. It is by prayer that we must obtain this blessing, and by faith that we must enjoy it.]

III. An enlarged discovery of his love—

[The presence of Christ in the soul is desired, in order to a more lively sense of his love. Now "the love of Christ has a breadth and length, a depth and height," which are utterly unsearchable[a]: it extends to the remotest corners of the earth: it reaches "from everlasting to everlasting:" it descends to the very confines of hell itself, and exalts to thrones of glory those who are its favoured objects. In its full extent, it "passes the knowledge" of men or angels; but in a measure it is "comprehended by all the saints." Men's capacity to comprehend it, is proportioned to their growth and stature in the Church of Christ: those who are but infants, have only narrow and contracted views of it; while those who are advanced to manhood, stand amazed at its immeasurable dimensions.

But

[a] Properly speaking, nothing has more than three dimensions; length, breadth, and thickness. The Apostle divides the last into two, in order the more strongly to express his idea.

But in order that we "may be able to comprehend it," we ourselves should be "rooted and grounded in love" to him. As a sense of his love is necessary to beget a holy affection in us towards him, so a love to him disposes our mind to contemplate, and enlarges our capacity to comprehend, his love to us. Each in its turn is subservient to the promotion of the other: but under circumstances of trial, which endanger the stedfastness of our profession, we are more especially called to have our love to him "rooted and grounded," so as to be immoveable amidst all the storms with which it may be assailed: and then, from every exercise of our own love, we shall acquire a greater enlargement of heart to admire and adore his love to us.]

IV. A repletion with all the fulness of God—

[The Apostle's prayer rises at every successive step, till he arrives at a height of expression, which, if it had not been dictated by inspiration, one should have been ready to condemn as blasphemy. Amazing thought! May we offer such a petition as this? Yes: there is indeed in the Deity an essential fulness, which is incommunicable to his creatures: but there is also a fulness, which he does, and will communicate[aa]. In him are all the perfections of wisdom and goodness, of justice and mercy, of patience and love, of truth and faithfulness: and with these he will "fill" his people, according to the measure of their capacity; so that they shall be "holy as he is holy, and perfect as their Father which is in heaven is perfect." If any possess but a small portion of his perfections, it is owing to their being "straitened in themselves; for none are straitened in him."

But how is this to be attained? Will repentance effect it? No. Will mortification procure it? No: that which alone will avail for this end, is an enlarged discovery of the love of Christ; and therefore the Apostle prays for the one *in order to* the other. Indeed, high thoughts of a creature's kindness to us have a natural tendency to produce in us a resemblance to him: but a sense of Christ's love has an irresistible influence[b] to transform us into his image, and to "fill us with all his fulness."]

REFLECTIONS—

1. How much do the saints in general live below their privileges!

[Who that is conversant with the religious world, would imagine that such things as are mentioned in the text were ever to be attained? One is complaining of his weakness and insufficiency; another, of his darkness and distance from Christ: one is harassed with doubts and fears; another bewails his emptiness and the prevalence of sin. Alas! alas! how different would be their experience,

[aa] Πλήρωμα θεότητος we cannot have: Col. ii. 9. This is πλήρωμα Θεῦ.
[b] 2 Cor. v. 14. συνέχει.

experience, if they were more constant and importunate in prayer! What strength and comfort, what light and holiness, might they not enjoy! Beloved Brethren, do but contemplate the state to which the Ephesians were taught to aspire, and you will blush at your low attainments, and be confounded before God for your partial acquaintance with his mercies.]

2. How rich is the benefit of prayer!

[There is nothing for which "effectual and fervent prayer will not avail[c]." However "wide we open our mouths, God will fill them[d]." We may search out all the promises in the Bible, and take them, like notes of hand, for payment: our God will never refuse what is good for us: his generosity is unwearied, his faithfulness inviolate, his treasury inexhaustible. O that there were in us such an heart, that we could go to him at all times, renewing our petitions, and taking occasion, from every fresh grant, to enlarge our desires, and be more importunate in our intreaties! Beyond the Apostle's request we cannot perhaps extend our conceptions: but short of them we would not stop. Ambition here is virtue. Let no strength but omnipotence, content us: no presence but the actual dwelling of Christ in our hearts, satisfy us: no view of his love but a comprehension of it in all its dimensions, limit our researches: nor any communication short of all the fulness of God, allay our appetite for his blessings.]

[c] Jam. v. 16. [d] Ps. lxxxi. 10.

MXXVI.

GOD'S POWER TO BLESS HIS PEOPLE.

Eph. iii. 20, 21. *Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end: Amen.*

MAN is a dependent creature, and therefore should be instant in prayer: but he is also a creature infinitely indebted to his God, and therefore he should abound also in thanksgiving. The Apostle's direction to us is, that "in every thing, by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, we should make our requests known unto God[a]." This rule he himself observed, as well in relation to those for whom he interceded, as for himself. He has been pouring out his heart before God on behalf of

[a] Phil. iv. 6.

of the Church at Ephesus; and he concludes the prayer with that animated doxology which we have just read.

It is our intention to consider,

I. His representation of the Deity—

God has given a wonderful display of his omnipotence in the visible creation; and he is ever ready to exert it in the behalf of those who call upon him. There is no limit to his power to bless his people—

[We may ask what we will, and he will do it for us[aa]. We may "ask" for the pardon of all our sins, the supply of all our wants, and for support in all our conflicts; and he will grant our requests. We may then bring forth all the promises in the Bible, and "ask" for the fulfilment of them all to our souls; and they also shall be granted. We may then collect all the most comprehensive expressions that language can afford us, and offer them in prayer before him; and still his liberality will keep pace with our petitions.

After having exhausted all the powers of language, we may proceed to stretch our imaginations beyond the limits of distinct and accurate conception: and, provided the things be proper for him to give, and for us to receive, he can, and will, bestow them. He will do for us not only what we ask, but what we "think;" he will do it "all" and "above" all, and "abundantly" above all, yea, "exceeding" abundantly above all that we can ask or think.

What a glorious view does this give us of the power and goodness of our God!]

The works which he has already wrought in us, are a specimen and pledge of what he will yet do for us—

[Let us survey what he has done, and is doing, in every one of his saints. *He has quickened a dead soul.*—This is as great a work as that which he performed in raising Christ from the dead, and setting him above all the principalities and powers of earth, of hell, of heaven; and, in that view, it displays the exceeding greatness of his power[b].

He has turned the tide of our affections back again to the fountain-head.—They were flowing with an irresistible current towards the creature: and God has arrested them in their course, and caused them to flow with rapidity and strength towards himself. We admire this phenomenon in rivers near the sea: but the spiritual change is an incomparably greater display of omnipotence than that; it is nothing less than a new creation[c].

He preserves a spark alive in the midst of the ocean.—What is the principle of grace within us, but a spark of heavenly fire kindled in

[aa] John xv. 7. [b] Eph. i. 18, 19. [c] 2 Cor. v. 17.

in us by the Spirit of God? But, instead of finding any thing in the heart to keep it alive, it meets with every thing calculated to repress its ardour. Yet though immersed, as it were, in an ocean of corruption, it maintains its vigour, and burns brighter in proportion to the efforts made for its extinction.

He has taken "a brand out of the burning," and is fitting it for a conspicuous ornament in his Temple.—We are in ourselves only like branches of a vine, of which "no use can be made, not even a pin to hang any vessel thereon[d]:" moreover, we still bear the marks of the fire upon us: yet is God forming and polishing us, that we may be an ornament to heaven itself; so that, when we appear there, the Workman shall be both "admired in us, and glorified in us[e]."

These things shew "the power which now worketh in us, according to which" God will exert himself in future. What he has done, and is yet doing, is an earnest of what he will do: it is the commencement of that work which will be perfected in glory.]

On this delightful view of the Deity the Apostle grounds,

II. His doxology—

That we may have a just and comprehensive view of this, let us consider,

1. What is that "glory" which is due to God—

[We certainly must not limit the word "glory" to the mere idea of praise. We must understand it as corresponding with the fore-mentioned character of God; and as importing *admiration, intreaty, confidence, thanksgiving.*

We cannot contemplate the power and goodness of God, without being filled with *admiration* and love. Instead of giving him glory, we should dishonour him in the highest degree, if we did not adopt the language of the Psalmist, "Who in the heavens can be compared unto the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord? O Lord God of Hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee[f]?"

And to what purpose do we admire God's power to bless his people, if we do not present before him our *intreaties?* It is in vain that we confess him able to answer and exceed our petitions, if we do not carry to him our sins to be forgiven, and our wants to be supplied. If we believe that he will fill our mouths, we cannot but open them wide[g].

We must also, under the most trying circumstances, maintain an unshaken *confidence* in him, as able and willing to save. It was by this that Abraham "gave glory to God:" "He staggered not at the promises through unbelief, but was strong in faith,"

[d] Ezek. xv. 3, 4. [e] 2 Thess. i. 10. [f] Ps. lxxxix. 6, 8.
[g] Ps. lxxxi. 10.

faith[gg]," believing, that if he should reduce his beloved Isaac to ashes, "God was able to raise him up again[h]," and to accomplish all that he had spoken respecting him.

As for the offering of *thanksgiving*, that is the first and most obvious meaning of the Apostle in the text. We must not think of God merely as "*able*" to do such great things, but as *willing* also: and for the encouragement which this representation of the Deity affords us, we must bless, and praise, and magnify his name. The words of the Psalmist are exactly suited to the occasion; "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things; and blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory: Amen, and Amen[i]."]

2. How, and by whom, it should be offered—

[It is "by Jesus Christ" alone that any blessings descend from God to us: and it is by him that our services must ascend to him. However devout and excellent the offering be, it cannot come to God but by Jesus Christ. It neither has, nor can have, any merit in itself: it must derive all its value from the merit of his death, and the virtue of his intercession. This is the uniform testimony of the Inspired Writers[k]: and it is of infinite importance that we should be grounded in the knowledge of it.

But who are they that are to give him glory? The Apostle says, "To him be glory in *the Church*." He does not exclude the *world*, as though they had no reason to bless their God; but because he knew that they had no disposition to bless him. They do not pray to him: How then should they receive answers to prayer? and how should they discover his ability to exceed our highest thoughts? But the Church are "a people nigh unto God[l]:" they are in the habit of praying to him, and of receiving answers to their prayers: and they know, by sweet experience, his power and willingness to save[m]. They therefore are disposed to give him glory: and they would gladly spend eternity itself[n] in advancing his honour, and singing his praise.

And is there one amongst you that does not add, "Amen?" If there be one such ungrateful wretch, let him know, that God is as "able to destroy as he is to save[o]." But let us hope rather that all of you are now like-minded with the Apostle, and that you will go from this place to "praise the Lord, who hath dealt wondrously with you[p]." Take then with you those delightful strains of David; "Among the gods there is none like unto Thee, O Lord; neither are any works like unto thy works: for thou art great, and doest wondrous things; Thou art God alone[q]."]

[gg] Rom. iv. 19—21. [h] Heb. xi. 17—19. [i] Ps. lxxii. 18, 19.
[k] Heb. xiii. 15. 1 Pet ii. 5. [l] Ps. cxlviii. 14. [m] Ps. cxxvi. 3.
[n] *εἰς πάσας τὰς γενεὰς τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων* is inimitable: the force of it cannot be preserved in a translation.
[o] Jam. iv. 12. [p] Joel ii. 26. [q] Ps. lxxxvi. 8—10.

MXXVII.

A CONSISTENT WALK ENJOINED.

Eph. iv. 1—3. *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

THE end of all true religion is practice: and the perfection of practice is a habit of mind suited to the relations which we bear to God and man, and to the circumstances in which from time to time we are placed. It is not by external acts only that we are to serve God: the passive virtues of meekness, and patience, and long-suffering, and forbearance, are quite as pleasing in his sight, as the most active virtues in which we can be engaged. Hence St. Paul, in entering on the practical part of this Epistle, intreats the Ephesian converts to pay particular attention to these graces, and to consider them as the clearest evidences of their sincerity, and the brightest ornaments of their profession. He was at this time a prisoner at Rome: but no personal considerations occupied his mind. He had no request to make for himself; no wish for any exertions on their part to liberate him from his confinement: he was willing to suffer for his Lord's sake; and sought only to make his sufferings a plea, whereby to enforce the more powerfully on their minds the great subject which he had at heart, their progressive advancement in real piety.

With a similar view we would now draw your attention to,

I. His general exhortation—

First, let us get a distinct idea of what the Christian's "vocation" is—

[It is a vocation from death to life, from sin to holiness, from hell to heaven.

Every Christian was once dead in trespasses and sins[a]——— But he has heard the voice of the Son of God speaking to him in the Gospel[b]——— and, through the quickening influence of the

[a] Eph. ii. 1. Tit. iii. 3. [b] John v. 24, 25. 1 Thess. i. 5.

the Holy Spirit, he "has passed from death unto life[c];" so that, though once he was dead, he is now alive again; and though once lost, he is found[d]———

From the time that he is so quickened, he rises to newness of life[e]. Just as his Lord and Saviour "died unto sin once, but, in that he liveth, liveth unto God," so the Christian is conformed to Christ in this respect, "reckoning himself dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ[f]." By his very calling he is "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God[g];" and engages to be "holy, even as God himself is holy[h]———

Once the Believer was a "Child of wrath, even as others[i];" and, had he died in his unconverted state, must have perished for ever. But through the blood of Jesus he is delivered from the guilt of all his sins, and obtains a title to the heavenly inheritance———. Hence he is said to be "called to the kingdom and glory of his God," and "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ[k]."

Thus is the Christian's "a high," "a holy," and "a heavenly calling."]

Such, Believer, being thy vocation, thou mayest easily see what kind of a walk that is which is suited to it—

[Dost thou profess to have experienced such a call? "Walk worthy of the" *profession* which *thou makest*, the *expectations* thou hast *formed*, and the *obligations* which are *laid upon thee*.

It is not any common measure of holiness that befits a person professing such things as these. How unsuitable would it be for one who pretends to have been "born from above," to be setting his affections on any thing here below; or for one who is "a partaker of the Divine nature," to "walk in any other way than as Christ himself walked!"———

And, seeing that you "look for a better country, that is, an heavenly," should you not aspire after it, and "press forward towards it, forgetting all the ground you have passed over, and mindful only of the way that lies before you?———. Should not "your conversation be in heaven," where your treasure now is, and where you hope in a little time to be, in the immediate presence of your God?

If you have indeed been so highly distinguished, should you not "live no longer to yourselves, but altogether unto Him who died for you and rose again?" Should any thing short of absolute perfection satisfy you? Should you not labour to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God[l]?"

This

[c] 1 John iii. 14. [d] Luke xv. 24. [e] Rom. vi. 4, 5.
[f] Rom. vi. 9—11. [g] Acts xxvi. 18. [h] 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.
[i] Eph. ii. 2. [k] 1 Thess. ii. 12. & 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.
[l] Col. iv. 12.

This then is what I would earnestly intreat you all to seek after, even to walk worthy of your high calling, or rather, "worthy of the Lord himself," who hath "called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."]

But that we may come more closely to the point, we will call your attention to,

II. The particular duties he inculcates—

In order to adorn our Christian profession, we must especially keep in view,

1. The cultivation of holy tempers in ourselves—

[Without this, nothing can ever prosper in our souls. "Lowliness and meekness" are unostentatious virtues; but they are of pre-eminent value in the sight of God[m]. They constitute the brightest ornament of "the hidden man of the heart," which alone engages the regards of the heart-searching God. In the very first place, therefore, get your souls deeply impressed with a sense of your own unworthiness, and of your total destitution of wisdom, or righteousness, or strength, or any thing that is good. No man is so truly rich as he who is "poor in spirit;" no man so estimable in God's eyes, as he who is most abased in his own. With humility must be associated meekness. These two qualities particularly characterized our blessed Lord[n]: of whom we are on that account encouraged to learn[o]; and whom in these respects we are bound to imitate, "having the same mind as was in him[p]." Let these dispositions then be cultivated with peculiar care, according as St. James has exhorted us; "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge amongst you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom[q]."

And whilst we maintain in exercise these graces, let us also be long-suffering, forbearing one another in love. However meek and lowly we are in ourselves, it cannot fail but that we must occasionally meet with things painful from others. The very graces which we manifest will often call forth the enmity of others, and cause them to act an injurious part towards us. But, if this should be the case, we must be long-suffering towards them, not retaliating the injury, nor harbouring resentment in our hearts, but patiently submitting to it, as to a dispensation ordered by Infinite Wisdom for our good. But, where this is not the case, there will still be occasions of vexation, arising from the conduct of those around us: the ignorance of some, the misapprehensions and mistakes of others, the perverseness of others, the want of judgment in others, sometimes also pure accident, will place us in circumstances of difficulty and embarrassment. But from whatever cause these trials arise, we should shew forbearance towards the offender, from a principle of love; not being

[m] 1 Pet. iii. 4. [n] 2 Cor. x. 1. [o] Matt. xi. 29.
[p] Phil. ii. 5. [q] Jam. iii. 13.

being offended with him, not imputing evil intention to him, not suffering our regards towards him to be diminished; but bearing with his infirmities, as we desire that God should bear with ours.

Now it is in preserving such a state of mind in ourselves, and manifesting it towards others, that we shall particularly adorn the Gospel of Christ: and therefore, in our endeavours to walk worthy of our high calling, we must particularly be on our guard, that no temper contrary to these break forth into act, or be harboured in the mind.]

2. The promotion of peace and unity in all around us—

[As belonging to the Church of Christ, we have duties towards all the members of his mystical body. There ought to be perfect union amongst them all: they should, if possible, be "all joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment[r]." But, constituted as men are, it is scarcely to be expected that all who believe in Christ should have precisely the same views of every doctrine, or even of every duty. But whatever points of difference there may be between them, there should be a perfect unity of spirit: and to preserve this should be the constant endeavour of them all. All should consider themselves as members of one family, living under the same roof: if the house be on fire, they all exert themselves in concert with each other, to extinguish the flames: they feel one common interest in the welfare of the whole, and gladly unite for the promotion of it. Thus it should be in the Church of Christ. Every thing tending to disunion, should be avoided by all; or if the bonds of peace be in any degree loosened, every possible effort should be made to counteract the evil, and re-establish the harmony that has been interrupted. A constant readiness to this good office is no low attainment; and, when joined with the graces before spoken of, it constitutes a most useful and ornamental part of the Christian character. Attend then to this with great care. Shew that you "do not mind your own things only, but also, if not chiefly, the things of others." Shew, that the welfare of the Church, and the honour of your Lord, lie near your heart: and let no effort be wanting on your part to promote so glorious an object. Be willing to sacrifice any interest or wish of your own for the attainment of it; even as Paul "became all things to all men," and "sought not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved."]

And now, let me, like the Apostle, make this the subject of my most earnest and affectionate INTREATY. Consider, "I beseech you,"

1. Its aspect on your own happiness—

[It

[r] 1 Cor. i. 10.

[It is the consistent Christian only that can be happy. If there be pride, anger, or any hateful passion indulged, "it will eat as doth a canker," and destroy all the comfort of the soul; it will cause God to hide his face from us, and weaken the evidences of our acceptance with him. If then you consult nothing but your own happiness, I would say to you, "Walk worthy the vocation wherewith ye are called; and especially in the constant exercise of humility and love."]

2. Its aspect on the Church of which you are members—

[It is impossible to benefit the Church, if these graces be not cultivated with the greatest care. In every Church there will be some, who, by unsubdued tempers, or erroneous notions, or a party-spirit, will be introducing divisions, and disturbing the harmony which ought to prevail. Against all such persons the humble Christian should be on his guard, and oppose a barrier. And it is scarcely to be conceived how much good one person of a humble and loving spirit may do. If "one sinner destroyeth much good," so verily one active and pious Christian effects much. Let each of you then consider the good of the whole: consider yourselves as soldiers fighting under one Head. Your regimental dress may differ from that of others; but the end, and aim, and labour of all, must be the same; and all must have but one object, the glory of their common Lord.]

3. Its aspect on the world around you—

[What will the world say, if they see Christians dishonouring their profession by unholy tempers and mutual animosities? What opinion will they have of principles which produce in their votaries no better effects? Will they not harden themselves and one another in their sins, and justify themselves in their rejection of the Gospel, which your inconsistencies have taught them to blaspheme? But if your deportment be such that they can find no evil thing to say of you, they will be constrained to acknowledge that God is with you of a truth, and to glorify him in your behalf. Especially, if they see you to be one with each other, as God and Christ are one, they will know that your principles are just, and will wish to have their portion with you in a better world[s].]

4. Its aspect on your eternal welfare—

[In all the most essential things, all the members of Christ's mystical body are of necessity united: there is "one body," of which you are members; "one Spirit," by which you are animated; one inheritance, which is the "one hope of your calling;" "one Lord," Jesus Christ, who died for you; "one faith," which you have all received; "one baptism," in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, of which you have all partaken; one

[s] John xvii. 21—23.

one God and Father of all, who "is above all," by his essential majesty, and "through all," by his universal providence, "and in you all" by his in-dwelling Spirit[1]: and shall you, who are one in so many things, be separated from each other so as not to be one in Christian love? It cannot be: your love to each other is the most indispensable evidence of your union with him: and, if you are not united together in the bonds of love in the Church below, you never can be united in glory in the Church above. If ever then you would join with that choir of saints and angels which are around the throne of God, be consistent, be uniform, be humble; and let love have a complete and undisputed sway over your hearts and lives.]

[1] ver. 4—6.

MXXVIII.

THE USE OF A STATED MINISTRY.

Eph. iv. 11—16. *And he gave some, Apostles; and some, Prophets; and some, Evangelists; and some, Pastors and Teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly framed together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*

IT is a truth never to be forgotten, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the fountain of life, and that "all our fresh springs are in him." Unless this be borne in mind, we shall never be able to do the will of God aright; nor will Christ ever be glorified by us as he ought to be. Hence the Apostle, after exhorting the Ephesian converts to walk worthy the vocation wherewith they had been called, reminds them, that, so far as they had been enabled to do this, they had done it through grace received from the Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to the predictions concerning him, had ascended

ascended up to heaven, and bestowed it upon them. One particular prediction to this effect he specifies; and then, commenting upon it, declares, that Jesus, having triumphed over all his enemies, had, after the manner of conquerors, who scattered gifts and largesses amongst their followers, conferred these and other blessings upon them. Of the other blessings he had bestowed upon his Church, the Apostle mentions some which were extraordinary and temporary, as Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists; and some which were ordinary and permanent, as Pastors and Teachers, whose office was to be continued for the benefit of the Church in all succeeding generations.

What the particular benefits were which the Church was to derive from these Pastors and Teachers, he then proceeds to notice, and sets them forth under a variety of most beautiful and instructive images. That we may enter more fully into the subject, we shall endeavour to shew,

I. The ends for which a stated Ministry was ordained—These were,

1. The perpetuating of a succession of duly-qualified instructors in the Church—

[This seems to be the import of those words which first occur in our text, and which might perhaps have been more properly translated, "For the fitting of holy men for the work of the Ministry for the edification of the body of Christ." Amongst the Jews, especial care was taken that the knowledge of the true God should be transmitted to the latest generations: as David says; "God established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children[a]." So under the Christian dispensation, care is taken, that there never shall be wanting a succession of persons duly qualified and authorized to transmit to every succeeding generation the knowledge of Christ, and of his Gospel. St. Paul says to Timothy, "The things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also[b]." Were the Ministerial office to cease, the Church itself would soon fall into decay: for though it is certain that the Scriptures are of themselves,

[a] Ps. lxxviii. 5, 6. [b] 2 Tim. ii. 2.

themselves, when applied by the Holy Spirit to the soul, able to make men wise unto salvation, it is also certain, that the ministry of the word is, and ever has been, the chief instrument which God makes use of for the conversion of the world. A vision was given to Cornelius, and an Angel sent to inform him where he might find an authorized instructor; and repeated visions were given to Peter, and not only given, but explained to him by the Holy Ghost, in order to remove his scruples, and prevail upon him to go to Cornelius, for the express purpose of honouring God's instituted means of communicating the knowledge of his Gospel. For the very same end was Philip directed, by the Holy Ghost, to go to the Ethiopian Eunuch, and to open to him the portion of Scripture which he was reading. The Spirit might as easily have opened the eyes of the Eunuch, without the intervention of Philip: but he chose to put the honour on the means which he had instituted; and to effect that by his Minister, which he would not effect by the word alone.

In all ages shall such Ministers be raised up, through the operation of the preached word; nor shall the Church cease to be supplied with them, till there shall remain no more members to be added to her, nor any further work to be wrought in those of which she is composed.]

2. The edification of the Church itself—

[The Church of Christ is His body: those who believe in him are his members: and every member has a measure of growth which it is destined to attain: and it is the completeness of the members in number and proficiency, that constitutes the perfection of the whole body. Towards this perfection the Church is gradually advancing. To help forward this good work, is the office of God's Servants, who are continually labouring for the good of the Church, and striving to edify her in *faith* and *love*. The ignorant they are to instruct; the weak they are to strengthen and establish; the wandering they are to bring back; and over every member are they so to watch, that all may be progressively fitted for the discharge of their respective offices, and that God may be glorified in all.]

But as the Ministry can be effectual only through the medium of our own exertions, it will be proper to shew,

II. The use we should make of it—

It finds us sinners: it brings us to the state of saints: and when formed by it into one great community, it leads us to a performance of the duties we owe to all the members of that body. In each of these states, we have duties to perform—

1. As

1. As sinners, we should seek that faith which alone will save us—

[There is but "one faith;" and one "knowledge of the Son of God," in which we must be all agreed. In matters of minor importance we may differ from each other: but "the Head we must all hold:" we must simply look to the Lord Jesus Christ, as dying for us, and as making reconciliation for us by the blood of his cross: our hope must be in him, and in him alone: and, if we place the smallest dependence on any thing of our own, we can have no part in his salvation. In relation to this matter, there must be no diversity: perfect "unity" is required: and to bring you to this unity, is the great scope of our labours. Brethren, consider this; and inquire whether our Ministry have had a proper influence upon you in this respect? Have you been made to feel yourselves guilty and undone; and have you fled to Christ for refuge, as to the one hope that is set before you? ——— Have you renounced all dependence whatever on yourselves; and are you daily looking to him as "made of God unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption?" ——— We say again, that if our Ministry be not effectual to bring you to this, it is not a savour of life unto you, but a savour of death to your more aggravated condemnation.]

2. As Believers, we should seek to "grow up into Christ in all things"—

[Whilst we are yet weak in the faith, we are in constant danger of being turned aside from the truth of God. Both men and devils will labour incessantly to draw us from the one foundation of a sinner's hope. But we are to be "growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." We are not to continue "as children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine:" we are to be aware of the devices of our enemies: we are to get a deeper insight into the great mystery of godliness: we are to become daily more and more established in the truth as it is in Jesus, so as to be proof against all "the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive." On whatever side we are assaulted, our enemies should find us armed. Are we attacked by the specious reasonings of false philosophy, or the proud conceits of self-righteous moralists, we should reject the dogmas both of the one and the other, and "determine to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified." "To him we should cleave with full purpose of heart," making daily more and more use of him in all his offices. As our Priest, we should confide more simply in the atonement he has offered for us, and in his continual intercession for us at the right hand of God. As our Prophet, we should rely on him more entirely to instruct us in the knowledge of God's will, and to guide us into all truth. As our King, we should look to him to

put

put down all our enemies, and to bring every thought of our hearts into captivity to his holy will. In a word, we should live more simply and entirely by faith in him, receiving daily out of his fulness all that we stand in need of, and improving it all for the glory of his name.

Thus to establish you in Christ, is a further intent of our Ministry; even to bring you to live in the same communion with him, as the members have with the head. You must feel that you have nothing in yourselves, but all in him: and whatsoever communications you receive from him, must be employed in executing his will, and in promoting his glory.]

3. As members of Christ's mystical body, we should seek to promote the welfare of the whole—

[In the natural body, all the members consult and act for the good of the whole: no one possesses any thing for itself only; but all being compacted together by joints and ligaments, and every joint, from the largest to the smallest, supplying a measure of unctuous and nutritious matter, each according to its ability for the benefit of the member that is in contact with it, and for the good of the whole body, all grow together; and *that* from infancy to youth, from youth to manhood, till the whole has attained that measure of perfection which God has designed for it. Thus it must be in the mystical body of Christ's Church. Believers are no more independent of each other, than they are of Christ: as they are united unto him by faith, so are they to be united to each other by love. None are to consider any thing which they possess as private property, but as a trust to be improved for the good of the whole. Nor are they to consider only that part of the body with which they are in more immediate contact, but the whole without exception; assured, that the happiness of the whole is bound up in the welfare of every part; and that all being connected by one common interest, all must labour together for one common end.

When this is attained, the intent of our Ministry is fully answered. A life of faith, and a life of love, is that for which God has begotten us by his Gospel——— But let me ask, Is this end answered upon us? Do we regard the whole Church of God, as well that part which is more remote, as that which is nearer to us, as members of our own body, entitled to all possible care and love? "O that it were thus in every place under heaven! O that there were no schisms in this sacred body! But let there be no want of effort, on our part, to advance the temporal and spiritual welfare of all around us: let there be "an effectual working in the measure of every part, that so the body may be increased, and the whole be edified in love."]*

* This may be easily improved for any subject connected with the Ministry.

MXXIX.

GRIEVING THE SPIRIT.

Eph. iv. 30. *Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

THE holy Scriptures are not written after the manner of human systems, but often blend warnings with promises, and duties with privileges, in a way that by some would be thought to involve them in inconstancy. The Apostle, cautioning the Ephesians against various evils which he had observed amongst them, adds, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God;" in which expression he seems eventually to refer to those who had "grieved the Lord in the wilderness," and had therefore been excluded from the Promised Land[a], and to those who "by rebelling against God had provoked his Holy Spirit, so that he was turned to be their enemy[b]." Yet at the same time he informs them, that the Holy Spirit had sealed them, as the Lord's property, unto the day of redemption, when he would claim them as his own. The advocates of human systems love not such apparent contrarieties: they would rather say, if they be sealed unto the day of redemption, how can they be in any danger of so grieving the Lord, as to be finally excluded from the heavenly Canaan? or, if they be in danger of such a calamity, how can it be that they should ever have been sealed unto the day of redemption? But we may safely leave these matters to God, who will clear up all such difficulties in the last day. That we may grieve the Holy Spirit, and that Believers are sealed by him unto the day of redemption, is equally certain: nor is there any great difficulty in reconciling the two, to a mind that is truly humble and contrite; because the liberty of man is not at all affected by the decrees of God: man never loses his proneness to fall, notwithstanding God's counsel shall ultimately stand: and therefore he needs at all times the caution in our text, whilst the encouragement afforded in it is at all times proper to animate his exertions.

But,

[a] Heb. iii. 10, 17. [b] Isai. lxiii. 10.

But,—not to enter into nice disquisitions about difficulties, which, after all that can be said upon them, can never be entirely removed,—we shall proceed, with a view to practical improvement, to notice,

I. The inestimable benefit conferred upon Believers—

Many are the offices which the Holy Spirit executes in the great work of redemption. He is the one Agent, by whom redemption is applied in all its parts. By him is life imparted to those who were dead in trespasses and sins: "he convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment;" and "glorifies Christ" in the sight of all who are so instructed, "taking of the things that are his, and shewing them unto them." But there is one office in particular which we are now called to speak of, namely, his sealing of Believers unto the day of redemption. This is more especially dwelt upon by the Apostle, in the first chapter of his Epistle, where he says that the Ephesian converts, "after they had believed in Christ, had been sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise, as the earnest of their inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession[c]." This office he executes upon all true Believers;

1. By an eternal designation of them to God's service—

[Such a seal most assuredly exists, and was made use of by Almighty God from all eternity; first, in the consecration of his only dear Son to his Mediatorial office; "for him hath God the Father *sealed*[d]:" and next, in the setting apart his chosen people to be his own peculiar treasure above all the people upon the face of the earth[e]: "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this *seal*, The Lord knoweth them that are his[f]." In the appointment of Abraham and his posterity to be a holy nation and a peculiar people, we all see and acknowledge the exercise of sovereign grace: but we find it difficult to acquiesce in this idea in reference to the eternal states of men. But where shall we draw the line? or how shall we justify the dispensations of God towards the Jewish people, if we deny his right to exercise the same sovereignty towards all the sinners of mankind? The truth is, that fallen man has no claim upon his God: in that respect he is exactly on a footing with the fallen angels: and, if God be pleased so shew mercy to any, he may do so in any way, and to any

[c] Eph. i. 13, 14.
[d] John vi. 27.
[e] Deut. vii. 6.
[f] 2 Tim. ii. 19.

any extent that he shall see fit: and if he select any as objects of his mercy in preference to others, he does no more injury to the rest, than he would to the great mass of the fallen angels, if he were at this moment, for the display of his own glorious perfections, to liberate any number of them from the chains of darkness in which they are bound. He "has a right to do what he will with his own: nor ought our eye to be evil because he is good[g]." It is certain that the Lord hath from eternity "set apart him that is godly for his own[h];" and not, because he *was* godly, or *would* be so, but because God of his own sovereign will and pleasure ordained him unto life: as St. Paul expressly tells us; "Whom God did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified:" their call in this world, and their glorification in the next, originating altogether in the predestination of God from all eternity[i].]

2. By the sanctification of their hearts and lives—

[This, if I may so speak, is the broad seal of heaven: "By their fruits ye shall know them:" "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." By this seal the Thessalonian converts were so distinguished, that St. Paul did not hesitate to infer, from what he saw in them, that they were God's chosen people; when he called to mind "their works of faith, and labours of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, he knew from it their election of God[k]." And on all true Believers this seal is found: God's "peculiar people are invariably found to be zealous of good works[l]."

Now this consideration may well reconcile us to the exercise of God's sovereign grace: for, if the idea of God's choice being altogether uninfluenced by holiness, either seen or foreseen in the objects of his choice, appear to militate against the interests of morality, the circumstance of God's having inseparably united this seal with the foregoing, sufficiently removes all fear on that head. In God's mind, our sanctification is as much ordained as our final salvation: "We are chosen, *that we may be holy*[m]," and "elect *unto obedience*[n];" and predestinated *to be conformed to the image of his Son*[o]: and in this way alone will any finally attain the salvation of his soul; since it is only *in*, and *by*, and *through* the means, that God has ordained the end: "He has from the beginning chosen us *to salvation;* but it is *through sanctification of the Spirit*, and belief of the truth[p]."]

3. By the manifestation of God's love to their souls—

[The Holy Spirit is a "Spirit of adoption" in the hearts of God's people[q]: he is also a "Witness testifying of their adoption:"

[g] Matt. xx. 15. [h] Ps. iv. 3. [i] Rom. viii. 29, 30.
[k] 1 Thess. i. 3, 4. [l] Tit. ii. 14. [m] Eph. i. 4.
[n] 1 Pet. i. 2. [o] Rom. viii. 28. [p] 2 Thess. ii. 13.
[q] Rom. viii. 15.

tion[r]:" yea, he is to them, and within them, an earnest of their everlasting inheritance[s]; "shedding abroad in their hearts that love of God," which will constitute their happiness through eternal ages[t]. In this also he operates as *a seal*, as St. Paul has said in reference to all true Christians: "Now he who establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also *sealed* us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts[u]."

By the first of these seals we are known to God alone: by the second, we are discoverable to those around us: by the last, an assurance of our happiness is imparted to our own souls. And though the impression of the two last is not at all times equally clear and strong, yet is it the privilege of all to possess them; and in proportion only as these last exist, will the first be ascertained.]

In connexion with the privileges of Believers, we may well consider,

II. Their duty towards their gracious Benefactor—

The Holy Spirit is here represented as a Parent, who, from his tender solicitude for the welfare of his children, is deeply "grieved" when they defeat in any respect the purposes of his love towards them. Now we may grieve the Holy Spirit,

1. By departing from the truth in our principles—

[The particular office assigned to the Holy Spirit in the economy of redemption, is, to "glorify Christ," by receiving of the things that are his, and "shewing them unto us[x]." Now in this office he delights: and when we duly appreciate the excellencies of Christ, and "behold his glory as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father," then is the Holy Spirit delighted to dwell with us, and to carry on the whole work of grace in our souls. But when we suffer the wily "serpent to beguile us, and to turn us from the simplicity that is in Christ," then is the Spirit grieved: for he is a jealous God, and especially jealous for the honour of that Saviour, whose cause he has espoused. Against two things then in particular we have to guard, namely, against philosophical subtleties on the one hand, and Jewish superstitions on the other. By both the one and the other of these was the Church of God rent, in the very first ages of Christianity; and thousands of souls were subverted by them. By the same are we also endangered. Our natural pride and self-conceit are ever at work, to add something to what God has revealed or to detract somewhat from it. Perhaps the simplicity of the Gospel is that which most offends the carnal mind. A simple life of faith upon the Son of God, as having loved

[r] Rom. viii. 16. [s] Eph. i. 13. 2 Cor. v. 5.
[t] Rom. v. 5. [u] 2 Cor. i. 21, 22. [x] John xvi. 14.

loved us and given himself for us, is most difficult to be maintained. We want to *be* something, or to *do* something, that so we may share the glory of Christ, and ascribe some part of his honour to ourselves: but he *is* all, and *must be* all; and "all who glory, must glory in him alone"———By retaining in constant exercise this humble and childlike spirit, we shall obtain frequent tokens of God's favourable acceptance: but by departing from it, we shall provoke him to hide his face from us.]

2. By dishonouring it in our practice—

[To this more especially does the Apostle refer, both in the preceding and following context. Unhallowed tempers and dispositions are most offensive to the Spirit of God. O that all the professors of religion throughout the world were made duly sensible of this truth! But, whether they consider it or not, God will not dwell where there is bitterness and wrath, and anger and clamour, and evil-speaking and malice, or an habitual want of a forbearing and forgiving spirit. Falsehood too in our words, and dishonesty in our dealings, and impurity in our hearts, will assuredly drive him from us, and bring down upon us the tokens of his displeasure: "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy[y]." It is no uncommon thing to find those who profess religion, low and miserable in their minds. But we should not wonder at it, if we knew what abominations are harboured in their hearts: we should rather wonder that God bears so long with them, and that his wrath does not break forth to consume them in an instant. Let us never forget this, that as well may light have fellowship with darkness, and Christ with Belial, as the Spirit of God abide with those who yield not to his sanctifying operations. If, instead of conforming ourselves to the mind that was in Christ, we rebel against him, we shall "vex his Holy Spirit, and provoke him to become our enemy[z]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who comply not with the written word—

[The word which is recorded in the Scriptures of Truth is *his* word: it is altogether given by inspiration from him. If therefore we comply not with *that*, we resist *him*, and "do despite to *him*." Consider this, ye who receive not the word with all humility of mind, or labour not to conform to it in your life and conversation: think, whom it is that ye resist and rebel against; even Him, who, if he depart from you, will leave you in a bondage from which you can never be delivered, and in misery from which you can never be redeemed[a]. O learn to tremble at the word of God, and beg that your whole souls may be so melted and poured into its mould, as to assume its every feature, and be formed into the perfect image of your God.]

2. Those

[y] 1 Cor. iii. 17. [z] Isai. lxiii. 10. [a] Hos. iv. 17. & ix. 12.

2. Those who rest in a mere formal compliance with it—

[You cannot deceive that blessed Spirit whose province it is to search the heart and try the reins. He requires "truth in our inward parts:" he requires that your heart be right with him; that you "walk in the Spirit," and "pray in the Spirit," and "live in the Spirit," and give yourselves up altogether to his godly motions. Do not therefore dissemble with him, lest he give you up to your own delusions, and seal you up in utter impenitence to the day of final retribution. Of those who held the truth in unrighteousness, we are told that he gave them up to a reprobate mind. I pray you, bring not upon yourselves this heaviest of all judgments: but to-day, while it is called to-day, surrender up yourselves entirely to his guidance, that he may "make you perfect in every good work, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight through Christ Jesus[b]."]

3. Those who are endeavouring to please him in all things—

[The day of redemption is near at hand. O blessed day, when all the remains of sin and sorrow shall be for ever banished from the soul! Look forward to it; and order your every action, word, and thought, in reference to it. Pray to the Holy Spirit to work yet more and more powerfully upon you, in order to prepare you for your appearance before the judgment-seat of Christ. Guard against any sloth in the ways of God, lest, like the Church of old, you cause him to suspend the communications of his love[c]. Pray to him to give you that white stone, which none but he who has it, can appreciate, and which has on it the name written which none but he who possesses it, can read[d]. Then shall you already enjoy even now a foretaste of your heavenly inheritance, and in due season "have an abundant entrance ministered unto you into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."]

[b] Heb. xiii. 20, 21. [c] Cant. v. 2—6. [d] Rev. ii. 17.

MXXX.

CHRIST'S LOVE A PATTERN FOR OURS.

Eph. v. 2. *Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.*

TO restore us to the Divine image is one great end of all that the Lord Jesus Christ has done and suffered for us. There are indeed perfections in the Deity which

which are incommunicable to any creature: but his moral perfections admit of imitation and resemblance: and therefore we are exhorted to "be followers, or imitators, of God, as dear children[a]." But in the person of our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jehovah is brought nearer to us, so that we may trace his very steps, and learn to follow him in every disposition of the mind, and every action of the life. Hence in the passage before us, whilst we are particularly informed of the manner in which he has displayed his love to man, we are exhorted to "walk in love, as he has loved us."

In our further elucidation of these words, we shall be led to speak of the Lord Jesus Christ in a two-fold view;

I. As a sacrifice to God—

It was not merely as a martyr that Jesus died, but as a sacrifice for sin. This appears,

1. From all the sacrifices of the Mosaic law—

[For what end were these instituted, but to prefigure him? These beyond a doubt were offerings for sin, the victims dying in the place of the offerer, and making an atonement for him by their blood: and if the Lord Jesus Christ did not correspond with them in this particular, and actually fulfil what those prefigured, they were all instituted in vain, and were shadows without any substance at all.]

2. From the declarations of the Prophets—

[The Prophet thus plainly speaks of Christ as dying for the sins of men; "He made his soul an offering for sin:" "He bare the sins of many:" "On him were laid the iniquity of us all[b]." What is the import of these testimonies, if Christ did not offer himself a sacrifice for sin?]

3. From the testimony of John the Baptist—

[It was in reference to the lambs that were offered every morning and evening for the sins of all Israel, that the Baptist spake, when he pointed out the Lord Jesus as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." If Christ were not a sacrifice for sin, this testimony was not founded in truth.]

4. From the declarations of Christ himself—

[He constantly affirmed, that "he came to give his life a ransom

[a] ver. 1. [b] Isai. liii. 6. 10, 12.

ransom for many:" that his blood should be shed for the remission of sins; and that by being "lifted up upon the cross, he would draw all men unto him."]

5. From the united testimony of all the Apostles—

[All with one voice represent him as redeeming us to God by his blood, and offering himself as "a propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world." In a word, the whole tenor of the Sacred Writings proves, that "he bare our sins in his own body on the tree," and "died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."]

But in all this he was further designed,

II. As an example to us—

In the circumstance before noticed, we cannot resemble him; for "no man can redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him." Nevertheless in the love which instigated him to this we may resemble him. Our love, like his, should be,

1. Disinterested—

[It is not possible for us to add any thing to him: we cannot make him more happy or more glorious by any thing that we can do: "our goodness extendeth not to him;" "nor can we by any means profit him:" yet did he in this astonishing manner display his love to us. Thus in the exercise of our love we should not consider whether the objects of it will ever be able to make us any suitable return: we should shew love in every possible way, without so much as desiring any return from man, or even desiring that our exercise of it should be known; yea, even though we knew that it would only be requited with evil. We should love our very enemies; and, "instead of being overcome of evil, should strive incessantly to overcome their evil with good."]

2. Generous—

[What unsearchable riches has he purchased even for his bitterest enemies! He would not that any one of them should fall short of all the glory of heaven. True it is, that we cannot thus enrich the objects of our love: yet we should do all we can towards it, by providing for them not only the things needful for the body, but, above all, the things that may promote the welfare of the soul. Here the poor may be on a par with those who are able to give out of their abundance: for if they are constrained to say, "Silver and gold have I none," they may add, "but such as I have, give I unto thee;" and then may proceed to speak to them of the Saviour, through whom they may obtain all the blessings of salvation. Thus, "though poor, we may make many rich."]

3. Self-

3. Self-denying—

[Our blessed Lord "emptied himself of all the glory of heaven," and endured all the wrath of an offended God; and became a curse himself, in order to deliver us from the curse which our iniquities had deserved. And shall we decline exercising our love, because it may be attended with some pain or difficulty on our part? No: we should not hesitate even to lay down life itself, if by so doing we may promote the eternal welfare of our brethren[c].]

4. Constant—

["Whom our Lord loved, he loved to the end." There were many occasions whereon his immediate Disciples displeased him: but he did not therefore "withdraw his mercy from them, or shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure." There are occasions also whereon we shall be called to exercise forbearance and forgiveness one towards another; and we ought to meet those occasions with love proportioned to them. We should strive with all our might to "follow peace with all men," and to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."]

ADDRESS—

1. Be thankful to Christ for all the wonders of his love—

[Think how unworthy you were of all his love: for, it was "when you were yet enemies, that he died for you." Think too what must have been your state to all eternity, if he had not so "undertaken for you:" his sufferings under the hidings of his Father's face, and under the strokes of Divine justice, shew what miseries awaited you in hell for ever, if he had not become your substitute and Surety to discharge your debt. Oh! never for a moment lose sight of the obligations you owe to him for that "love of his, which passeth knowledge."]

2. Present yourselves as living sacrifices to him—

[This *may* be done; and it is the very end for which such astonishing mercies have been vouchsafed to you[d]. Consider all that you are, and all that you have, as his; and let it all be devoted henceforth to the glory of his name.]

3. Endeavour to resemble him more and more—

[Whatever attainments you may have made, you must still be aspiring after higher degrees of love[e]. Look at him then, not only as the ground of your hopes, but as the pattern for your imitation. Trace him in all the labours of his love: trace him from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven: trace him in all that he either did or suffered: and study to resemble him in the whole

[c] 1 John iii. 16. [d] Rom. xii. 1. [e] 1 Thess. iv. 9, 10.

whole of his spirit and deportment. In all his labours "God smelled a sweet savour;" even as he had done in those offerings and sacrifices by which Christ had been shadowed forth[f]: and though your labours of love can never resemble his, as making an atonement for sin, they shall, like his, come up for a memorial before God, and be accepted as well-pleasing in his sight[g].]

[f] Gen. viii. 21. Lev. i. 9. [g] Heb. vi. 10. & xiii. 16.

MXXXI.

A CONSISTENT WALK ENJOINED.

Eph. v. 8. *Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as Children of light.*

MANY imagine, that when they have believed in Christ, the work in them is complete: and, if they were then to die, it is true that they would be complete; because it is said of all Believers, "Ye are complete in Christ, who is the Head of all principality and power." But no man in this world is so complete, but that he still needs to be urged forward, by warnings and exhortations, and promises and examples. This is clearly manifest from all the Apostolic writings, in which the saints are cautioned against every species of sin, and stimulated to every species of duty. The latter half of this Epistle is altogether addressed to Believers, in this precise point of view, exhorting them to "walk worthy the vocation wherewith they are called[a]." The truth is, that saints are yet only as "brands plucked out of the burning:" they still bear the marks of the fire strong upon them, and are still in danger of being consumed by the influence of fiery temptations, if God in his mercy do not preserve them. Their safety is in watchfulness and prayer: in watchfulness, that they give not occasion to Satan to inflame their souls with evil; and in prayer, that, as soon as any spark shall light upon them, it may be extinguished. To all, without exception, of whom it may be said, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord," the exhortation that is added must be addressed; "Walk as children of light."

In discoursing on these words, we shall be led to shew,

I. The

[a] Ch. iv. 1.

I. The change which all true Christians have experienced—

"They once were darkness"—

[The term "darkness," in Scripture language, imports ignorance, sin, and misery: and therefore most fitly expresses the state of unconverted men. The mind of the natural man is blind to the things of God: they are spiritual, and he cannot comprehend them for want of a spiritual discernment[b]. He knows not the spirituality of God's law, or the total alienation of his heart from God. He has no just views of the Divine perfections, no adequate sense of his need of a Redeemer; no true perception of the beauty of holiness, or of the excellency of a life entirely devoted unto God. To himself he lives, and not to God: he is a law unto himself, and does nothing but with a view to the gratification of his own feelings. Pleasure, interest, and honour, are the gods whom he serves: and beyond the things of time and sense he has no object of ambition or pursuit. In this state he may find what the world calls happiness; but to real happiness he is a stranger. Whatever satisfaction he feels, it is in a forgetfulness of eternal things that he feels it, and not in the contemplation of them. The thought of death and judgment is appalling to him; and is sufficient to make him, like Belshazzar, tremble in the midst of all his mirth; so that "his countenance shall change, and his knees smite one against the other[c]." It is the heart-searching God who says, that there is "no real peace to such persons[d]," but that destruction and misery are in their ways[e]."

Nor let it be thought that this is the character of some only whose wickedness has been of a more flagrant nature: for St. Paul assures us, that it was once his own state, no less than that of others[f] — — — and therefore we may be sure that it is common to all. Indeed a very little knowledge of mankind will convince us, that "the whole world lieth in wickedness[g]," and unconverted men are not only dark, but "darkness" itself, even darkness visible.]

But "they are now light in the Lord"—

[In their conversion they are "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Their views of self, of sin, of God, of Christ, of every thing around them, are changed — — — — In consequence of "the eyes of their understanding being enlightened," they come forth from the broad road in which they have been walking, and begin to tread the narrow, and less frequented paths, of holiness and life. Their whole labour now is to "put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and to put on the new man, which after

[b] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [c] Dan. v. 6. [d] Isai. lvii. 20, 21.
[e] Rom. iii. 16, 17. [f] Eph. ii. 3. Tit. iii. 3. [g] 1 John v. 19.

after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" ——— Now they are no longer under bondage to the fear of death, or bowed down with the apprehensions of God's eternal wrath: they see that he is reconciled towards them in the Son of his love; and with "a spirit of adoption they come before him, crying, Abba, Father." In a word, they now enjoy peace in their souls, even that "peace of God, which passeth all understanding" ———

All this they have "in the Lord," that is, by virtue of union with him, and by grace derived from him. Being now members of Christ's mystical body, they possess all that is in him their living Head, according to the measure of the grace they have received from him. "With Christ is the fountain of life; and in his light they see light."]

Whilst we contemplate this blessed change, we must not overlook,

II. The obligations it entails upon them—

Consistency is required of all: of course, if we have been made "light in the Lord, it becomes us to "walk as Children of light." By this expression we are taught,

1. What line we are to pursue—

[The commandment of the Lord is a lamp, and his "law is light[h]:" and by his law are we to direct our steps. That Holy Spirit who has opened our eyes, and renewed our hearts, marks out for us our path, in direct opposition to that which the unconverted world pursue; as the Apostle tells us in the words following our text: "The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." Whilst the ungodly indulge in all the forementioned iniquities, our conduct is to be the very reverse of theirs. In opposition to all unholy tempers[i], we are to abound in every thing that is "lovely and of good report" ——— In opposition to all that may interfere with the welfare of others[k], we are to do in all things precisely as, in a change of circumstances, we should think it right for our neighbour to do unto us ——— And in the whole of our deportment towards both God and man, there should be the most inviolable "truth," even a perfect integrity of mind, a spirit that is without guile ——— Perhaps we may get somewhat of an idea of our duty from what we behold amongst the heavenly bodies. The stars are all irradiated by the sun; and in respect of that great luminary, may be called children of light. These, according to their capacity, reflect the brightness of the sun, and impart to others the light they have received. So it should be with us: we should make our light to shine before men, that so those who behold us may know how to walk, at the same time that they are constrained to glorify that

[h] Prov. vi. 23. [i] Ch. iv. 31. [k] ver. 3.

that Sun of Righteousness whose beams we reflect. This is the idea inculcated by the Apostle himself, who tells us, that we must "shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life[l]," and "proving" in our own persons "what is acceptable unto the Lord[m]."

But there is yet another idea, and a very important one suggested in this expression, "Children of light." It is the property of light to make things manifest; and consequently, we are to bear our testimony against all the deeds of darkness, not only "having no fellowship with them, (for "what fellowship can light have with darkness[n]?") but reproving them[o]," and bearing our testimony for God against all who commit them.

Such then must our conduct be, holy and exemplary, decided and firm.]

2. In what spirit we should walk in it—

["Children of disobedience" are such as, from the propensity of their nature, live in wilful and habitual disobedience to God's commands. So "Children of light," from the impulse of the Holy Spirit, walk cheerfully and habitually in the ways of God. They are not compelled, like slaves, to serve him against their will; but, like dear children, they love their Father's will, and find his ways to be ways of pleasantness and peace. Nor is it merely on some particular occasions that they obey his voice: they do it constantly, and without reserve: "they delight to do his will;" and "run the way of his commandments with enlarged hearts." This characterizes the angels around the throne: and it distinguishes also the children of the living God: they "do his will, hearkening to the voice of his word[p]," and making every succeeding act a prelude to yet further services.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have never yet experienced this change—

[Be assured, it must be experienced before you can ever enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whether your lives have been more or less polluted with outward sin, you have all equally lived to yourselves, instead of unto God: and your consciences bear testimony against you, that to secure an interest in Christ, and to grow up into his image, and to live for his glory, have not been the great objects of your ambition, nor has your departure from this path been any source of humiliation to your souls. What is darkness, if this be not? It is, in fact, a living "without God in the world:" and this path, if persisted in, will bring you to "the blackness of darkness for ever." But I thank God, there is no room for despondency. The Lord Jesus Christ has "come a light into the world, that whoso followeth him should not walk in darkness,

[l] Phil. ii. 15, 16. [m] ver. 10. [n] 2 Cor. vi. 14.
[o] ver. 11, 13. [p] Ps. ciii. 20.

darkness, but have the light of life[q]." For this very end was he given, that "he should be a light to the Gentiles, and say to the prisoners, Go forth; and to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves[r]." Despair not therefore; but intreat, that, as the Sun of Righteousness, he would "arise upon you with healing in his wings." And hear, for your encouragement, his gracious promise: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight: these things will I do unto them, and not forsake them[s]." But delay not to seek these blessings at his hands. Seek them "before he cause your darkness to increase, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and, while ye are looking for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness[t]." To this effect our Saviour himself charges you: "Yet a little while is the light with you: Walk whilst ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the Children of light[u]."]

2. Those who have an evidence in themselves that it has been wrought in them—

[However the world may despise it as enthusiasm, there are many who have "passed from death unto life," and "been brought out of darkness into marvellous light." O rejoice in the Lord, who hath done such great things for you! And now set yourselves to walk worthy of this high calling. Think what manner of persons ye ought to be, and what a holy heavenly conversation becomes you. Guard against every degree of return to your former state. Guard against those who would draw you back, or impede your progress in the heavenly life. It is your privilege "to walk in the light, as God is in the light[x];" and to have your path like the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day[y]. And, whilst this is really the desire and labour of your souls, fear not: your God will be with you, "causing your light to rise in obscurity, and your darkness to be as the noon-day." Then may you look forward with confidence to that day, when your present light, like that of a taper, shall be eclipsed by the infinitely brighter splendor of the sun; even to that day, when "the sun shall be no more your light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto you; but the Lord shall be unto you an everlasting light, and your God your glory[z]."]

[q] John viii. 12. [r] Isai. xlix. 6, 9. [s] Isai. xlii. 16.
[t] Jer. xiii. 16. [u] John xii. 35, 36. [x] 1 John i. 6, 7.
[y] Prov. iv. 18. [z] Isai. lx. 19, 20.

MXXXII.

REDEEMING THE TIME.

Eph. v. 15, 16. *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

WHILE the Christian has so many corruptions within, and temptations without, he needs to be continually urged to vigilance and activity in the concerns of his soul. It was to the saints at Ephesus, even to the most eminent amongst them, that St. Paul addressed the exhortation before us: in which we may notice,

I. The duty of maintaining a circumspect walk—

We are evidently referred in the text to what had been spoken in the preceding context: from whence we are to gather the precise ideas which the Apostle comprehended in the terms, "Walk circumspectly."

We should walk,

1. As persons who enjoy the light—

[Those who walk in the dark, know not how to order their step[a]: but they who walk in the noon-day, can see how and where to place their feet with accuracy and exactness[b]. Now we have the light of God's word[c]; and should therefore carefully avoid setting our foot in a place where we are liable to slip, or contract defilement.]

2. As persons that are afraid of erring—

[We are ever in danger of being led astray by the example of those around us. But we should "call no man, Master;" we should not follow St. Paul himself, any further than he followed Christ. If any should presume to vindicate what is contrary to the word of God, we should "take care not to be deceived" by their specious reasonings; and, instead of being "partakers with them," we should "avoid all fellowship with their unfruitful works;" yea, instead of conforming to them, we should "reprove them[d]."]

3. As persons that are anxious to please their God—

[Neither the opinions of others, nor selfish interests, are to regulate our conduct. We have but one inquiry to make, "What will please my God?" That view, that desire, that purpose, must be the spring of our actions, whether in public or in private[e]. With a view to approve ourselves to him, we should as carefully

[a] John xii. 35. [b] This is the more proper meaning of ἀκριβῶς.
[c] ver. 8, 13, 14. [d] ver. 6, 7, 11. [e] ver. 10, 17.

carefully inspect our motives and principles, our dispositions and frames, as if we saw him immediately present, and observed his eye fixed upon our hearts."]

From this general view of the subject, we descend to notice,

II. An important instance, wherein, more especially, circumspection should be mentioned—

There is nothing wherein circumspection is more needful, than in the improvement of our time—

[It is lamentable to think how much time is lost for want of a due solicitude to "redeem" it. Even in relation to temporal concerns, there are very few who are good economists of their time. But, in reference to their eternal interests, men let ten thousand opportunities pass them unheeded, and unimproved. Many have passed through half their lives, and not yet begun to seek the salvation of their souls. And of those who have not been altogether so careless, how many are there, whose spiritual interests are at a very low ebb! They have not sufficiently watched the lapse of time, or been duly impressed with a sense of its value: and hence, "when for the time they ought to be qualified for teachers, they still need to be taught the first principles of the Oracles of God[f]."]

We should therefore set ourselves instantly to "redeem the time"—

[We should consider what it is that has robbed us of our precious hours, and guard particularly against it. Has *pleasure* allured us by its charms? We should renounce its gratifications, as far as they interfere with our spiritual welfare. Has *business* too much occupied our time? We should apportion to it what is necessary in our respective situations; but not suffer it to supersede our religious exercises. And, if the duties of our calling are such as to leave but a contracted space for reading and prayer, we should be the more earnest in consecrating the whole of the Sabbath to the service of our God. *Visiting and company* are found in general to be among the chief destroyers of our time: against these we should resolutely set ourselves; that, if we cannot recover what is passed, we may at least prevent the depredations which we are but too likely to experience in future. From *sleep* too we should redeem all that has been allotted to mere indulgence, and all that nature does not require for the renovation of her strength. Our whole time is little enough for the concerns of our souls; and therefore we should suffer as little of it as possible to run to waste, or to pass off in unproductive channels.]

To

[f] Heb. v. 12.

To enforce the observance of this circumspection, the Apostle suggests,

III. Motives and inducements to maintain it—

He recommends it,

1. As a proof of wisdom—

[No greater folly can be conceived than for persons to be regardless of their eternal interests, and to trifle away that time which they ought to be employing in the concerns of their souls. It is true, that a circumspect walk, and a due improvement of time, are often called preciseness or enthusiasm: but let those who know not the value of the soul, deride these things: still, in the judgment of every discerning person, to walk with the greatest possible care and exactness, is to "walk, not as fools, but as wise:" for "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding[g]."]

2. As a mean of safety—

["The days" of the Apostles were "evil," on account of the persecutions that raged: for every person felt that all his comforts might be speedily withdrawn, and that he might soon fall a sacrifice to his profession. This therefore was urged as a reason for vigilance and circumspection: for if they might so quickly be called to give up their account to God, it became them to be ever on their guard, and ever ready. Our lot, through the tender mercy of our God, is cast on happier days: we are not exposed to the fury of persecutors: the utmost that we suffer, is, for the most part, a little contempt, and the loss of some temporal interests. Still however our "days" may justly be called "evil," because of the general prevalence of infidelity and profaneness[h]. We are as liable to be ensnared by evil examples, as those at Ephesus were to be turned aside by the fear of man. "Iniquity abounds; and therefore there is danger lest the love of many should wax cold." If then we would not be drawn into the vortex of corruption, we should keep at a distance from it; and if we would stand in the day of trial, we should improve each passing hour in preparation for it.]

[g] Job. xxviii. 28.

[h] If there be war, famine, pestilence, or any other public calamity, it might be mentioned here.

MXXXIII.

THE PERFECTING OF THE CHURCH IS THE END OF ALL THAT CHRIST HAS DONE FOR IT.

Eph. v. 25—27. *Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water,*

water, by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish.

THE morality of the Gospel, though not more extensive than that of the Law, is yet more clearly revealed, and exhibited in a more endearing light. Its obligations are not set forth amidst denunciations of wrath, as those of the Law were upon Mount Sinaï; but models of perfection are set before us, and we are invited by considerations of love and gratitude to make them the objects of our imitation. Not only our duty to God, but even our relative duties are set before us in this manner. St. Paul instructing wives in their duty to their husbands, tells them, that the Church's obedience to Christ is the fittest pattern of their obedience to them. Then instructing husbands how to conduct themselves toward their wives, he proposes to them Christ's love to his Church as the model for their love to their wives. It is in this connection that the words of our text are introduced. But the Apostle can never touch upon so glorious a topic as the love of Christ, without expatiating upon it, and being transported, as it were, to a forgetfulness of his proper argument. The view which he here gives us of it, is deserving of peculiar attention. It will lead us to consider,

I. The demonstrations which Christ has given us of his love—

He loved his Church from before the foundation of the world: and he has displayed his love to it in a manner that must fill both men and angels with everlasting astonishment. Every member of it was dearer to him than his own happiness; more desirable to him, if we may so speak, than his own glory. He loved us to such a degree, that for our sakes he gave up the happiness which he enjoyed in his Father's bosom, and the glory which he possessed upon his Father's throne: he gave himself for us, that he might be,

1. A surety for our persons—

[The debt which we owed to Divine Justice could never be discharged by mortal man: nor was there any superior Being able or willing to take upon himself our awful responsibility. Our case

case was desperate, as much so as that of the fallen angels. But the Son of God, of his own infinitely rich grace and mercy, was pleased to undertake for us. What Paul said to Philemon respecting Onesimus, he said to his Father respecting us; "What do do they owe thee? put it all to my account: I will repay thee. Whatever shall be necessary to ransom them from the hands of incensed justice, let it be exacted of me: I will be answerable for it; I will pay it, to the uttermost farthing[a]."]

2. A sacrifice for our sins—

[It was not by corruptible things, as silver and gold, that we could be redeemed. Satisfaction must be made for all our violations of God's holy law. Death was the desert of man; and death must be endured by the Son of God himself, if he should put himself in the place of sinful man. This was fully known to our adorable Saviour; and yet he would not shrink from the conditions. He had set his heart upon his chosen people, and he was prepared to pay the price, even though it were his own life. Accordingly he took our nature for the express purpose of offering it up a sacrifice for sin. In that nature he made a full atonement for all our transgressions, and satisfied the utmost demands of law and justice. In short, he so gave himself to be an offering and sacrifice to God, that God smelled a sweet savour, and became instantly reconciled to his offending creatures[b].

What manner of love was this! Who can ever explore "its heights and depths, its length and breadth?" Well may "God *commend* his love to us" by this particular instance[c]; for it is, and ever must be, without a parallel: it as far exceeds our conceptions as it does our deserts.]

To assign any adequate reasons for such love is impossible: but the riches of it will appear in a striking point of view, if we consider,

II. The ends for which it has been so demonstrated—

The design of Jesus in the whole of his Mediatory work has been, to bring back our fallen race to the enjoyment of all that they had lost by sin. He gave himself for us, that we might enjoy,

1. A restoration to his image—

[It was not merely a salvation from misery that Christ came to impart, but a salvation from sin, which is the cause of misery. He came to set us apart for God as a holy and peculiar people; and to cleanse us not only in "the laver of regeneration in baptism, but by the renewing of the Holy Ghost." The washing of water in baptism was only the external sign of that spiritual grace

[a] 1 Tim. ii. 6. [b] Rom. v. 8. [c] ver. 2.

grace which it is the delight of his soul to bestow. "He will sprinkle clean water upon us, and cleanse us from all our filthiness, and from all our idols[d]." Without this spiritual renovation, all his other mercies would be in vain. Man could not be happy, if he were not first made holy.

The instrument by which this grace is conveyed to the soul, is the Word of God. The word, both written and preached, is that whereby we are begotten of him[e]; by which also, as new-born babes, we are nourished[f]; and by which the whole work of sanctification is carried on[g]. The Holy Spirit indeed is the agent, who renders the word effectual: but the Gospel is "the rod of his strength," and it is by that he renovates and saves the world.]

2. A participation of his glory—

[When sinners are in a measure cleansed with the washing of water by the word, the Ministers who have been instrumental to that change, "espouse them to one husband, and present them as a chaste virgin to Christ[h]." And while the work of sanctification is advancing in them, they are like those virgins who were destined for the embrace of Eastern monarchs, who were purified during several months for that end, till they were judged meet for the dignity to which they were to be exalted[i]. The time for their complete honour and felicity is the day of judgment; when the Bridegroom himself shall come to take them home to himself, and to fix them in the mansions prepared for them. Then they will be "without spot or wrinkle; they will be perfectly holy and without blemish." They will be "presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy[k]." What "a glorious Church" will they then be! Here their glory is obscured by spots and blemishes: but there they will not have "any such thing:" they will be "pure as God is pure," and "perfect as God is perfect."

If any thing can account for the stupendous efforts of Christ's love, it must be *this*. *This* is an end worthy of the Supreme Being. *This* will be such a display of his power and grace as will for ever fill all heaven with wonder and admiration.]

Suffer ye now a word of EXHORTATION, grounded on the foregoing subject—

1. Desire holiness—

[This is what the Lord Jesus Christ has desired for you. To obtain this for you, he divested himself of all his glory, and endured the accursed death of the cross. He desired this for you, because it was the only medium through which you could arrive at happiness, and because it could not fail of rendering you completely

[d] Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26. [e] Jam. i. 18. [f] 1 Pet. ii. 2.
[g] John xv. 3. [h] 2 Cor. xi. 2. Ps. xlv. 13, 14.
[i] Esther ii. 12. [k] Jude 24.

pletely happy. Ah! do not despise it. Do not turn away from it, as inimical to your welfare. Do not consider it as a mere system of restraints, a burthen that is intolerable. It is in truth the perfection of your nature, and the completest liberty: it is a liberty from the thraldom of corruption, and from the tyranny of Satan. Desire it therefore, even as Christ has desired it for you; and never think any sacrifice too great for the attainment of it.]

2. Use the means of attaining it—

[The word is the means which God in every age has made use of for the recovery of fallen man. By that he converted thousands in the primitive ages of the Church: and by that he is still carrying on his work in the souls of men. Let the Scriptures then be searched by you, not to gratify curiosity merely, or to exercise a critical acumen, but to obtain the knowledge of God's will, and an increasing conformity to his image. Read the Sacred Volume as a book that is to make you holy. When you hear the word preached to you, hear it with a desire to get a deeper discovery of your sins, and a more perfect victory over them. Whether you read, or hear, or meditate, or pray, let it be with an immediate view to grow in holiness and a meetness for glory.]

3. Look forward to the perfection of holiness as the consummation and completion of all your wishes—

[Higher than this you cannot look; and lower you ought not. This was the ultimate design of all that Christ undertook for you, and of all that he did and suffered for you. Do but consider how happy you will be when not a spot or blemish can be found in you, even by God himself; when you shall be perfectly like your God; and when you shall enjoy the most intimate and endearing fellowship with your Lord, without any alloy, or intermission, or end. Do not rest in any thing short of this. Suffer not any of the pleasures of time and sense to rob you of it. Surely the very prospect of such glory is enough to kindle in your souls the devoutest rapture, and to stimulate you to incessant activity in your Christian course. Yield yourselves now unfeignedly to the Lord[1]; and he will, in the last day, present you to himself, and acknowledge you as his for evermore.]

[1] Rom. xii. 1.

MXXXIV.

UNION WITH CHRIST.

Eph. v. 30. *We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.*

THAT

THAT the eternal Son of God assumed our nature, and lived and died for the salvation of men, is doubtless the fundamental truth on which we are to build our hopes. But we shall have a very partial view of that truth, if we consider it merely in reference to our acceptance with God. The Apostles state it as the strongest of all motives to obedience, and as the pattern which, as far as circumstances will admit of it, we are bound to imitate. To go no further than the context; St. Paul is stating the duties of husbands and wives: and, having observed that wives are to be as obedient to their husbands, in all lawful things, as the Church is to Christ, he shews, that husbands are not, however, at liberty to act the tyrant; but that they should at all times be influenced by love, and consult the good and happiness of their wives, as much as Christ himself does of the Church, to whom he stands in a similar relation[a].

The words before us are, in this view, deserving of the deepest attention; since they not only unfold a most mysterious and important truth, but tend in the highest degree to meliorate our tempers, and to diffuse universal happiness. Let us consider then,

I. The union which subsists between Christ and his Church—

There is a *personal* union which Christ has with our nature, by means of his incarnation[b], and which was necessary for the executing of the great work which he had undertaken[d]. But in this the whole human race participate, without any distinction. The union which Christ has with the Church is distinct from that, and is,

1. Legal—

[There is, among men, an union between a debtor and his surety; insomuch, that if a debt be not discharged, the surety is as much answerable for it as if he had contracted it himself: and if, on the contrary, it be discharged by the surety, the creditor has no further claim on him that contracted it. Thus it is with respect to Christ and his Church. He is the Surety of the new covenant[e]: having undertaken for us, he was charged with our debt; "it was exacted of him, and he was made answerable[f]."

Having

[a] ver. 22—30. [b] John i. 14.
[d] Heb. ii. 11, 14, 16. [e] Heb. vii. 22.
[f] Isai. liii. 7. Bp Lowth's version.

Having paid the debt, his payment is put to our account; "By his obedience we are made righteous[g]." In a word, "He who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we (who had no righteousness) might be made the righteousness of God in him[h]."]

2. Spiritual—

[Very much is spoken in Scripture respecting the Spiritual union which subsists between Christ and his people. To mark that they stand by him alone, it is compared to a foundation and the superstructure[i]. To shew that he is the one source of vital influence to them all, it is illustrated by a root and the branches[k]. To intimate that one Spirit pervades both him and them[l], it is set forth under the image of a body; he being the Head, and they the members[m]. To convey some idea of the tender endearments with which it is accompanied, it is shadowed forth by a marriage union. This is the representation given in the text. He is our husband[n]; and we are his bride[o]: and, as Adam said of Eve when she was brought to him, "She is flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bones[p]," so may we say respecting the Lord Jesus Christ, "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones."

Whatever beauty there is in all the other figures, methinks there is a peculiar propriety in that which is now under our consideration, because it marks that volition, yea, and those means also whereby the union is effected. The Lord Jesus Christ displays before our eyes his excellency and glory, his suitableness and sufficiency; and, by the constraining influence of his love, inclines us to leave all that has hitherto been esteemed by us, in order to connect ourselves with him, and enjoy his presence[q]. We accept that gracious proposal, "Thou shalt not be for another man; so will I also be for thee[r]:" and being thus engaged by a solemn covenant, we surrender up ourselves to him, whether it be for better or for worse in this world, determining through grace to "be faithful unto him, even until death."]

We prosecute the idea of a marriage union no further at present, because it will be more fully opened, while we shew,

II. The blessings resulting from it—

It is needless to expatiate upon the comforts and benefits of that relation among men: but we cannot be too minute in specifying the blessings that result from an union with Christ. The chief of them will come under our review, while we observe, that,

1. He

[g] Rom. v. 19. [h] 2 Cor. v. 21. [i] Eph. ii. 20—22.
[k] John xv. 5. [l] 1 Cor. vi. 17. [m] Eph. iv. 15, 16
[n] Isai. liv. 5. [o] Rev. xxi. 9. [p] Gen. ii. 23.
[q] Ps. xlv. 10, 11. Mark x. 29, 30. [r] Hos. iii. 3.

1. He has communion with us in all our trials—

[One who understands the duties of a husband, and labours faithfully to discharge them, is ever ready to sympathize with his partner in her afflictions of whatever kind, and solicitous to the utmost to relieve them. What is done to her, whether it be good or evil, he considers it as done to himself. Thus it is with our blessed Lord. Are we tempted?——— a consciousness of his relation to us calls forth his sympathy, and engages his utmost exertions on our behalf[s]——— Are we persecuted? He feels in his inmost soul the dagger that pierces us[t]——— Do we labour under distresses of any kind? "In all our afflictions he is afflicted[u];" and every attempt made to mitigate our trouble, he accepts, as if he himself were personally relieved[x]———]

2. We have communion with him in all his benefits—

[A woman, from whatever rank she be taken, is no sooner united in the marriage-bond, than she is exalted to a participation of all the honours and possessions of her husband. Thus it is with the Church when united unto Christ. Is he possessed of a perfect righteousness, commensurate with the highest demands of law and justice? They who are joined to him by faith, are partakers of it all, and may boldly call him, "The Lord our Righteousness[y]." However sinful they may have been in former times, "in him shall they be justified, and in him may they glory[z]" ——— Has he within himself an inexhaustible fountain of grace[a]? They may receive it out of his fulness[b]: and having had a measure of it communicated to them, they may go to him for more[c]: yea, whatever supplies they may need, they shall have sufficient for them[d]; sufficient to mortify every sin[e], to fulfil every duty[f], to triumph over every enemy[g]——— Is he enthroned on high, the heir, and Lord of all things[h]? Let not his people think that even these things are too great for them: for they shall have a throne like unto his throne[i], a kingdom like unto his kingdom[k], a glory like unto his glory[l]———]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have reason to believe that they are "married to Christ[m]"—

[If we congratulate our friends when they are settled in life with a fair prospect of happiness, shall we not much more congratulate you; you, who by your connection with Christ are become Children of the living God[n]? What earthly advancement can

[s] Heb. ii. 17, 18. & iv. 15. [t] Zech. ii. 8. Acts ix. 4.
[u] Isai. lxiii. 9. [x] Matt. xxv. 35—40. [y] Jer. xxiii. 6.
[z] Isai. xlv. 24, 25. [a] Col. i. 19. [b] John i. 16.
[c] Jam. iv. 6. [d] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [e] Rom. vi. 14.
[f] Phil. iv. 13. [g] Rom. viii. 37. [h] Heb. i. 2.
[i] Rev. iii. 21. [k] Luke xxii. 29. [l] John xvii. 22.
[m] Jer. iii. 14. Isai. lxii. 5. [n] John i. 12.

can be compared with this? Who among the children of men is so wise to discern, so tender to regard, so able to relieve, your every want? We hope that you know your union with him. It is certainly your privilege to know it, and to rejoice in it[nn]. "Rejoice then in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice[o]." ——— But together with your privileges, remember also the duties which this high relation bringeth with it. Would you be unfaithful to him, or grieve him in any thing? God forbid. Remember the fervent attachment[p], the humble reverence[q], the unreserved submission[r], which a dutiful wife feels towards her husband: and let these feelings be transferred in the highest possible degree to your august "Head[s]," and be exercised towards him without any intermission or alloy[t]———]

2. Those who have no evidence that such an union has been formed—

[They who have felt no need of an union with Christ, will be ready to say, like Ezekiel's hearers, "Ah! Lord God, doth he not speak parables[u]?" But indeed "we speak forth the words of truth and soberness[x]." You hope to bring forth fruit to God in some other way than by an union with Christ: but you may as well expect a branch to be fruitful, when separated from the vine[y]. The image in the text is applied by St. Paul in reference to this very thing: he tells us, that "we must be married unto Christ, that we may bring forth fruit unto God[z]." Moreover, if you be not united to Christ in this world, you will in vain hope for an union with him in the world to come. This is the time wherein you are to be betrothed to him. Seek then to know him: seek to become an object of his regard: seek to be united to him as intimately as he is to his Heavenly Father[a]. Be not contented with *seeking*, but *strive*; strive to obtain an interest in his favour; nor cease from your labour till you can say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his[b]." Then shall you have the most delightful fellowship with him[c]: you shall have such manifestations of his regard, as the world can neither know nor receive[d]: and, when all earthly connexions shall cease, your happiness shall be consummated in the everlasting fruition of his love[e].]

[nn] John xiv. 20. [o] Phil. iv. 4. [p] Tit. ii. 4.
[q] Eph. v. 33. [r] ib. ver. 22, 24. 1 Pet. iii. 1, 5, 6.
[s] Eph. v. 23. 1 Cor. xi. 3.
[t] If this were preached on the occasion of *a Marriage*, it would be proper to shew to the parties present, that their cheerful performance of their relative duties is indispensable, as an evidence of their union to Christ.
[u] Ezek. xx. 49. [x] Acts xxvi. 25. [y] John xv. 4, 5.
[z] Rom. vii. 4. [a] John xvii. 21. & vi 56, 57.
[b] Cant. ii. 16. [c] 1 John i. 3.
[d] John xiv. 21, 22. ib. ver. 17. [e] 1 Thess. iv. 17.

MXXXV.

GROWTH IN GRACE.

Phil. i. 8—11. *God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere, and without offence, till the day of Christ; being filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God.*

THE connexion subsisting between a Pastor and his flock is set forth in the Scriptures under the most endearing images. While *they* are spoken of as his beloved children, *he* is represented as the father that begat them, and as the nursing mother who cherishes them in her bosom, Even these images seem to have been too faint to depict the tender regard which St. Paul bore towards those who had been converted by his ministry. He longed for their welfare with more than human affection. He could compare his feelings with nothing so justly as with the yearning of the Saviour's bowels over a ruined world. Nor was he actuated by partial and personal attachments: his regards were universal: they extended to every member of Christ's mystical body: yea, he could appeal to God himself, that he felt the deepest interest in the prosperity of "all," whether more or less distinguished by worldly rank or spiritual attainments. Among the various ways in which he manifests his concern for them, he was especially mindful of prayer and intercession: and though in these benevolent exercises he was solicitous only to approve himself to God, yet he thought it proper on many accounts to inform them of the means he used for their benefit; and to declare to them the particular things which he sought for in their behalf.

From the prayer before us, we see that he desired,

I. Their intellectual improvement—

"Love" is absolutely essential to a Christian: without that, whatever else we may possess, we are only

as

as sounding brass or tinkling cymbals. Love is the characteristic feature of the Deity: and in this every one of his children resemble him. By this mark we are made known to others as the disciples of Christ: by this we ourselves also are assured, that we have passed from death unto life. In this amiable quality the Philippians "abounded." But the Apostle wished them to abound in it "yet more and more." He was solicitous that it should display itself in a becoming manner. He prayed therefore that their "love might yet more and more abound,"

1. In knowledge—

[Knowledge is properly the foundation of love. Whatever we fix our affections upon, we love it for some real or supposed excellence that is in it. If we are unacquainted with the qualities of any person or thing, it is not possible that we should feel any real attachment to him or it. Our love to God therefore, and to his people, should be daily nurtured and strengthened by an increasing acquaintance with them. Our views of the *Divine perfections* are, at best, but very narrow and contracted. So little are we acquainted with his *providence*, that we can only faintly guess at the reasons or issue of his dispensations. The *mysteries of Redemption* are very superficially discovered by us. What we know of *Christ* is extremely partial and defective. The nature, extent, and beauties of *holiness* are very dimly seen. The privileges and blessedness of *the Lord's people* are but little understood. Wherever we turn our eyes, we are circumscribed by very narrow limits. On every side there are heights and depths, and length and breadth, that cannot be explored. To be searching into these things is our imperative duty, our exalted privilege. If "the angels desire to look into them," much more should we. It is by more enlarged views of them, that our love to them must be confirmed and advanced. We should therefore labour incessantly to form a just estimate of heavenly things, and to have our affections regulated by an enlightened understanding.]

2. In a spiritual perception of the things known—

[Merely speculative knowledge is of little avail: it is only like the light of the moon, which dissipates obscurity indeed, but communicates neither heat nor strength. The knowledge which alone will augment our love, is that which produces suitable impressions on the mind; it is that which, like the sun-beam, enlivens and invigorates our whole frame. Now there is a great difference, even amongst good men, with respect to their perception of Divine truths. There is, if we may use the expression, a spiritual taste, which is acquired and heightened by exercise.

As,

As, in reference to the objects of sense, there is an exquisite "judgment" attained by some, so that their eye, their ear, and their palate can discern excellencies or defects, where others, with less discriminating organs, perceive nothing particular; so is there, in reference to spiritual things, an exquisite sensibility in some persons, whereby their enjoyment of divine truth is wonderfully enhanced[a]. Now this is the knowledge which we should aspire after, and in which our love should progressively abound. We should not be satisfied with that speculative knowledge, which may be gained from men and books; but should seek that spiritual discernment, which nothing but the operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul can produce[b]. Whatever be the particular objects of our regard, we should get a realizing sense of their excellency, and be duly impressed with their importance.]

These views and impressions the Apostle desired for them, in order to a further end[c]:

II. Their moral improvement—

Love, when duly exercised, is the main-spring of all acceptable obedience. When abounding in knowledge and in *all* judgment, so as to be suitably affected with every thing, it will improve the whole of our conduct and conversation. It will make us,

1. More judicious—

[We are very apt to be misguided with what is specious. Hence many embrace erroneous *principles*, or rest in delusive *experiences*, or justify an unbecoming *conduct*. Even in the Apostolic age, many were turned from the faith by the sophistry of false teachers: and every day presents some to our view, who are ready to admire and applaud themselves for those very things which more disinterested persons see to be their characteristic failings: yea, plain and palpable faults are not unfrequently committed by persons unconscious of acting wrong, in whose eyes the very faults they commit are either innocent or praiseworthy. It is not the world only that put darkness for light; even the godly themselves are apt to confound good and evil; and it is no inconsiderable part of Christian wisdom to distinguish them from each other. The Apostle was anxious that his Philippian converts should form a correct judgment, and so *try* the *things that differed* from each other, as to be able to discern the more excellent; just as a refiner proves his metal in the furnace, and thus ascertains its real worth[d].

But

[a] Heb. v. 14. [b] 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10, 12, 14.

[c] εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τὰ διαφέροντα.

[d] This seems to be the precise idea contained in the Apostle's words. See Note [e].

But how shall this be done? We answer, By having our love to divine things more under the influence of an enlightened and spiritual mind. We shall then have within ourselves a faculty, as it were, whereby we may discern the things submitted to it. Our views being more comprehensive, and our judgment more spiritual, we shall be able to weigh every thing in a juster balance, and to discriminate with far greater exactness. As the different senses are fitted to give us a right estimate of the things on which they are exercised, so the mind, imbued with ardent love, extensive knowledge, and spiritual discernment, will rightly appreciate whatever presents itself to its notice, and calls for its decision.]

2. More stedfast—

[Though sincerity is ever an attendant on true religion, yet is there much hypocrisy still remaining in the renewed heart. We do not mean that there is any *allowed* guile; for that would at once determine a man to be no true Israelite: but every grace in man's heart is imperfect, and admits of growth; and consequently, sincerity among the rest. Moreover, as long as we continue in the body, we are liable to err; and not only to stumble ourselves, but even to become stumbling-blocks to others. Not the attainments of St. Peter himself could place him beyond the reach of sin. We may appeal to all who "know the plague of their own hearts," Whether they do not still feel within themselves a proneness to act with an undue reference to the good opinion of their fellow-creatures; and whether they have not still reason to lament the existence of manifold defects in their deportment towards God and man! Now it is of infinite importance, to the honour of religion and the comfort of our own souls, that these defects be remedied as much as possible; that we be more and more delivered from the influence of corrupt passions; and that we be kept sincere and upright until the day of Christ.

But how shall this stedfastness be attained? We can prescribe no better means than those referred to in the text. A loving spirit, abounding in clear, spiritual, and impressive views of divine truth, will assist us greatly in the whole of our conduct. A feeling sense of the love of Christ upon our hearts will fortify us against every temptation; it will make our walk circumspect, our conscience tender, our zeal ardent, our obedience uniform.]

3. More diligent—

[In estimating a fruit-tree, our principal inquiry respects its fruit: its foliage and blossoms are objects comparatively unimportant. Thus the principles and professions, the experiences and the habits of a Christian are no further valuable, than as they are connected with the substantial fruits of righteousness.

His

His love, whether to God or man, must lead to active exertions, and must shew itself in the practice of universal holiness. He should be like a tree whose boughs are laden with fruit. Such a Christian adorns his profession, and recommends religion to all who behold him: and the fruit which he bears, by virtue derived from Christ, does, through the merits of Christ, ascend up with acceptance before God; and tends exceedingly to exalt the honour of God in the world. Such fruitfulness, I say, is the great end of all the mercies vouchsafed unto him, and of all the love which he professes to feel towards Christ and his people.

But how shall this be secured? We can recur to nothing more effectual than that already mentioned. If we increase in a spiritual perception of the excellency and importance of the Gospel, we cannot fail of being stirred up to activity and diligence in the ways of God: we shall not be satisfied with bringing forth thirty or sixty-fold, but shall labour to bring forth fruit an hundred-fold, and to be "filled with" it in all seasons, and under all circumstances. "Give me understanding," says David, "and I shall keep thy law, yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart."]

APPLICATION—

[While we admire the Apostle's tender solicitude for the souls of men, let us cherish a just regard for our own souls; and, by mutual exhortations and fervent intercessions, endeavour to the utmost to advance the interests of religion, in each other, and in the world at large.]

MXXXVI.

CHRIST MAGNIFIED IN OUR BODY.

Phil. i. 20. *Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death.*

WHILST the great mass of mankind, like a ship driven with fierce winds and tossed upon tempestuous waves, are uncertain what may be the event of their trials, the true Christian is like a ship at anchor: he beholds the storm, but defies its power: he knows that every effort, either of men or devils, to destroy him, shall issue in his own welfare, and in their confusion. St. Paul was in prison at Rome, uncertain whether he should be set at liberty or put to death. He had adversaries also amongst the professed followers of Christ, who laboured to increase his affliction, by weakening his

his influence in the Church, and drawing away his converts to their own party. But he knew, that the more his afflictions abounded, the more were the prayers of God's people offered up on his behalf, and the more would a supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ be poured out upon him. He was therefore satisfied, that, however matters might terminate with respect to temporal deliverance, they would issue in his final "salvation;" and that he should be so strengthened from above, as never to "be ashamed" of his profession, but rather that, as in past times, so to the latest hour of his existence, "Christ should be magnified in his body, whether it were by life or by death."

This expression is very singular, and deserves more than ordinary attention. We propose therefore to consider,

I. *In what sense* Christ may be magnified in our body—

We may easily conceive that Christ should be *served*, or *honoured* by us; but how can he be *magnified?* Can we add any thing to his *essential dignity?* No; he is "God over all, blessed for evermore." Can we add to his *Mediatorial honours?* No; we cannot augment his Kingly power, or give virtue to his Priestly sacrifice, or enlarge his influence as the great Prophet of the Church. Can we add to *the glory that he possesses in heaven?* No; the angels and glorified saints are already glorifying him, day and night, with all their faculties and all their powers. Surely then (it may be said) this is a proud, if not a blasphemous, expression. No: we must not so hastily condemn an inspired Apostle. You ask then, How can we *magnify* Christ? We answer, that he may be magnified by us both in word and deed: "O magnify the Lord with me," says the Psalmist, "and let us exalt his name together." *This* shews what may be done by *our voices:* and as to *our actions*, we may be said to magnify him, when in our conduct we set forth,

1. The purity of his law—

[It is not only in "bearing one another's burthens," but in obeying all the precepts of the Gospel, that we are to "fulfil the law

law of Christ." Now the extent of this law is not in any degree imagined by the world at large: they have no idea of the motives, the principles, the conduct which the Christian code inculcates. But when a Child of God is enabled to act up to his profession, he shews to all around him the beauty of holiness: he commends to them the law which he obeys: he constrains them to see and acknowledge its transcendent excellence: and in advancing thus the honour of the law, he honours also the Lawgiver: "In adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour," he adorns and magnifies the Saviour himself.]

2. The perfection of his character—

[The Christian follows the steps of his Divine Master, and endeavours to "walk as he walked." Now if *his* path be luminous, what must that of the Lord Jesus have been? The most eminent of our fallen race was no more in comparison of him, than a twinkling star (I should rather say, a glow-worm) in comparison of the meridian sun. If therefore the effulgence of a poor and sinful creature like ourselves be such as to attract the admiration of all that behold it, much more must the splendor of Emmanuel's holiness exceed in glory; insomuch that the attainments of Paul himself have no glory by reason of his glory that excelleth.]

3. The blessedness of his service—

[If we see a person grudging every labour that he performs, we naturally conclude that his task is irksome, and that the master whom he serves is not (in his esteem at least) worthy of any high regard. But if we behold a person straining every nerve, and exerting himself day and night in the most arduous services, and, after all, complaining only that he cannot perform one half of what he wishes to do for his master, we conclude, of course, that he loves both his work, and his master too. When therefore we behold an exemplary and laborious Christian devoting all his powers to the service of his God, and all the while taking shame to himself as an unprofitable servant, we are constrained to say, that (in his eyes at least) his Lord is worthy of all honour, and the work in which he is engaged is perfect freedom. The devotedness of the servant is a high and public commendation of his Lord.]

4. The power of his grace—

[*It is to this chiefly that the Apostle refers:* and it is by a display of this that Christ is chiefly magnified. A river flowing with a rapid and majestic current to the sea, would defy the efforts of the whole world to turn it back again to its source; yet by the returning tide it is not only arrested in its course, but driven up again with equal rapidity towards the fountain-head. It is thus that a sinner, when rushing with the whole current of his affections

affections towards this present world, is stopped in his career of sin, and turned back with an irresistible impulse towards high and heavenly things. Let men, yea, let all the angels in heaven, attempt to effect this change, and their united efforts would be in vain. Who then that witnesses this change, and beholds the Believer's victories over sin and Satan, and his progressive advancement in the ways of holiness, must not adore that power by which so great a miracle is wrought? *In this* Christ is indeed magnified: "the exceeding greatness of his power is made known;" and the sufficiency of his grace is incontrovertibly established.]

Let us now proceed to inquire,

II. *By what means* Christ may be magnified in our body—

St. Paul knew not whether his present imprisonment would issue in life or death: but in either case he hoped and expected that Christ would be magnified in his body; that is, either by the *renewed services* of his body, or its *protracted sufferings* unto death. In order then to magnify Christ in our body, we must,

1. Use our body as an instrument to fulfil his will—

[The Apostle was a fit pattern for us. Were his feet at liberty? he travelled from Judea round about into Illyricum, that he might carry to Heathen nations the glad tidings of the Gospel. Were his hands at liberty? he worked by night, that he might be able to preach by day. Was his tongue at liberty? he preached Christ incessantly, and encouraged all to put their trust in him. It is thus that we also should act. We are not indeed called to execute like him the Apostolic office, and, consequently, not to tread precisely in the Apostle's steps: but we are called to walk in the same spirit, and to employ all the faculties of our body in the same manner. We should "yield all our members instruments of righteousness unto God." We should consider our eyes, our ears, and all our powers, as consecrated to him, and to be used for him. And though our sphere may be very contracted, yet may every one of us find abundant scope for the exercise of piety and benevolence, if we will only put forth the powers that we have, and embrace the opportunities that are afforded us. Dorcas was limited in her means of doing good; yet were her exertions so great, that the whole Church at Joppa wept and deplored her loss: and *we* also may endear ourselves to multitudes, and greatly magnify the Lord, if in our respective places we improve the talents committed to our care.]

2. Endure cheerfully whatever we may be called to suffer for his sake—

[There

[There is a kind of suffering which we should account no suffering at all: we should "mortify our earthly members," and "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts," and cut off the right hand, or pluck out the right eye, that is an occasion of offence to us. But there are other sufferings, which though we may deprecate, we must expect and submit to, saying, "Not my will, but thine be done." Reproaches, persecutions, imprisonments, and death, are, more or less, the portion of all who follow Christ. Doubtless they are not pleasing to flesh and blood: yet, as they may be the means of displaying the power and grace of Christ, we may not only bear them, but even "take pleasure in them." St. Paul cheerfully submitted to them in this view: "We bear about," says he, "in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifest in our body[a]:" and, to manifest the importance of that thought, he repeats it almost in the same words in the very next verse. Let us meet our trials in the same way; and then, as he has told us, His strength shall be perfected in our weakness, and His name be magnified in our obedience.]

ADDRESS,

1. The self-indulging world—

[You seem to think your body made only that you might adorn, pamper, and gratify it. What resemblance then have you to the Apostle? Till you know the true use of the body, and employ it in its only legitimate exercises, you have no pretensions to the Christian Character[b].]

2. The inactive professor—

[St. Paul intimates, that there is but one alternative; you will either "be ashamed," or "magnify Christ with your body:" if by any considerations you are deterred from glorifying Christ, you so far renounce all your principles, professions, and expectations: but if you value Christ as you ought, you will live and die for him. Judge which is better for yourselves, and more suitable to your obligations to him.]

3. The advancing Christian—

[What a noble ambition is yours[c]! You are not contented to serve or enjoy Christ, but must also magnify him. Go on; and he will soon "make your vile body like unto his glorious body" in a better world: and whatever others may be, *you* shall "*not be ashamed* before him at his coming."]

[a] 2 Cor. iv. 10, 11.
[b] Dan. v. 23. & 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.
[c] 2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

MXXXVII.

ST. PAUL'S DILEMMA.

Phil. i. 21—24. *To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose, I wot not: for I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*

THE way to ascertain the real excellence of religion, is to see what it can do for us in the hour of trial, when all other helps and comforts fail us. If it can support us then, and make us to triumph over all the feelings of nature, its power must be confessed to be exceeding great and highly beneficial. Now that it has that power, is evident from the example before us. St. Paul was in prison at Rome, confined there in order to be brought forth for execution, whenever Nero, the Roman Emperor, should issue the command. Contentious teachers in the mean time were taking advantage of his confinement, to draw away disciples after them, and seeking thereby to add affliction to his bonds. And what effect had these things upon him? As for his own sufferings, from whatever quarter they came, he was persuaded they would issue in his everlasting salvation; whilst the efforts of the teachers, notwithstanding the corruptness of their motives, would issue in the salvation of others: his mind therefore was kept in perfect peace, and he was equally willing either to live or die, assured that Christ would certainly be magnified in his body, whether by life or death. This blessed state of equanimity is admirably depicted in the words of our text. In order to take a fuller view of it, we shall point out,

I. The prospects of the Apostle—

These were truly blessed both in life and death:

1. In life—

[Two objects were near his heart; namely, to honour Christ, and to benefit the Church. "To him to live was Christ." To exalt Christ, to make known his salvation, and to extend the boundaries of his kingdom, was his constant aim, his sole employment———To further the welfare of the Church also, by con-

firming the faith, and advancing the happiness, of the disciples, this was the office that had been delegated to him by God himself, and which he had now for many years endeavoured to execute to the utmost of his power.

He had already succeeded to an astonishing extent in promoting these objects; and he had no doubt but that, if his life were prolonged, they would continue to be advanced by means of his ministrations———]

2. In death—

[Having fled for refuge to the hope set before him, he was well assured that he was accepted in the Beloved. He had already for many years been with Christ by faith, walking as before him, depending upon him, holding sweet fellowship with him, and receiving continually out of his fulness: but he expected, immediately on his departure from this world, to be with him in a more intimate and immediate manner, beholding his glory, and enjoying the fullest possible communications of his love———

Not that these prospects were peculiar to him. The weakest Christian enjoys the same, only in an inferior degree: for every one who truly believes in Christ, will assuredly seek the advancement of his kingdom, and may firmly expect a participation of his glory.]

Though these prospects were so glorious, yet they created some embarrassment in his mind. He proceeds to mention,

II. The straits and difficulties to which they reduced him—

He speaks not indeed of any serious difficulties, but only of a dilemma to which he was reduced by the contrary desires within him[a]:

For his own sake he wished to die—

["To die," he says, "would be gain to him." And a glorious gain indeed it must be to one so prepared for death as he! To get rid of sin, and sorrow, and temptation, and suffering, of every kind; to have all the faculties of his soul perfected, all its capacities enlarged, all its wishes accomplished; to behold all the glory of his God and Saviour; to join with all the hosts of heaven in songs of joy and triumph; and to enter upon a state of unalienable everlasting felicity; well might he say, "This is far better:" for even *his* exalted happiness whilst on earth, must fall infinitely short of such a state as that———

We

[a] We apprehend that the 22d verse should rather be translated thus: "But whether it be worth my while to live in the flesh, and what I shall choose, I know not." This not only renders the verse intelligible, but the whole passage luminous. See Beza, in loc.

We wonder not therefore that he wished to exchange his present trials for that unutterable bliss ———]

For the sake of others he wished to live—

[It certainly was very desirable, and, in some sense, "needful" for the Church, that his labours should still be continued to them. They still needed his instruction to guide them, and his influence to preserve them, in the right way. Doubtless God could have guided and preserved them, without the intervention of any human Being: but He has ordained men to be the instructors of his Church, and has connected the prosperity of his people with the labours of their Ministers: and therefore the Apostle's labours were of infinite value to those who could enjoy them. This he felt: he had reason to think, that, if he were spared to come to them again, their faith would be strengthened, and their rejoicing in Christ Jesus would be more abundant "*through* him[b]." Indeed the Church is a great hospital, in which experienced physicians regularly attend to the wants of the patients, and administer to them respectively from the inexhaustible storehouse of God's word, whatever they judge most suited to their necessities ———

From this consideration, he was as willing to live, as from other views he had been desirous to die: and he was for a while perplexed by the opposite attractions of public and personal advantage.]

But benevolence soon triumphed, and formed,

III. The ultimate decision of his mind—

[Whether God made any revelation to him on the subject, or he inferred the purposes of God from the effects of Divine grace operating on his soul, we know not: but he knew that he should abide and continue with the Church for some time longer; and he cordially acquiesced in this appointment. His mind was instantly assimilated to the mind and will of God: and he was willing to *bear* more, that he might *do* more; and to postpone *his own* enjoyment even of heaven itself, that he might bring *others* to enjoy it with him.

Blessed disposition of mind! how honourable to the Christian character! how worthy to be imitated by all who name the name of Christ! Yes; thus should we all "seek, not our own things, but the things of Jesus Christ;" and "not our own wealth, but the wealth of others" ———]

This subject furnishes abundant matter,

1. For painful reflection—

How few are there, even of the people of God, who attain to this

[b] ver. 25, 26. ἐν ἐμοί. To translate this "*for* me," lowers the sense exceedingly.

this heavenly *state of mind!* As for the ignorant ungodly world, they are indeed often reduced to a strait, not knowing whether it is better, to protract their miserable existence on earth, or to terminate it at once by some act of suicide. And if they choose life rather than death, it is not from love to God and to their fellow-creatures, but from the fear of that vengeance which awaits them on their departure hence. Ah! terrible dilemma! yet how common! The people of God, it is true, are, for the most part, far enough removed from this. What they may for a moment be brought to, under some extraordinary weight of trial and temptation, we presume not to say: for Job, that holy and perfect man, has sufficiently shewn us what is in the human heart. But peace and joy are the usual attendants on a state of acceptance with God: and it is the Believer's own fault, if he possess not such foretastes of heaven, as to make him long for death, as the door of entrance into perfect bliss. O my Brethren, why is not this your state? Is it not owing to your retaining too much the love of this world in your hearts? Is it not owing to secret declensions from God, and to your not meditating sufficiently on the glories of heaven? Let me intreat you to gird up the loins of your mind, to take continual surveys of your future inheritance, and so to live in habitual fellowship with Christ, that death may be disarmed of its sting, and be numbered by you amongst your richest treasures[c].]

2. For interesting inquiry—

[*How are we to obtain that blessed state of mind?*—The answer is plain: Let it be "to us Christ to live;" and then it will assuredly be "gain to die:" and, however great our desire after that gain, we shall have a self-denying willingness to live, for the honour of Christ and the benefit of his people. Let us then seek a due sense of our obligations to Christ, that we may be constrained to live entirely for him. Let our first inquiry in the morning be, What can I do for my Lord this day? And in the evening, Have I rendered to him this day according to the benefits I have received from him? By such exercises we shall get our hearts inflamed with holy zeal for his glory; and shall be made willing to forego even our own happiness in heaven for a season, that we may serve him the longer on earth, where alone we can render him any effectual service. We shall lay out ourselves to render Christ more known, and his people's joy in him more abundant. In short, if we get the principles of the Apostle rooted in our minds, we shall exhibit a measure at least of his holy practice in our lives*.]

[c] 1. Cor. iii. 21, 22.

* If this were a *Funeral Sermon* for any eminent Minister or Christian, his example might here be modestly commended, and proposed for imitation.

MXXXVIII.

A HOLY CONVERSATION RECOMMENDED.

Phil. i. 27. *Only let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ; that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel.*

THE interests of immortal souls should be dear to every one, but most of all to the Ministers of Christ. Neither the height of prosperity, nor the depth of adversity, should ever induce us to forget them. Our blessed Lord, when in the bosom of his Father, could not rest, (if we may so speak,) till he had undertaken our cause; nor in the midst of all his sufferings did he relax his solicitude in our behalf. St. Paul also, in every diversity of state, was so intent on the salvation of his fellow-creatures, that he counted not even his life dear to him so that he might be instrumental to their eternal welfare. He was now in prison at Rome: yet what employed his thoughts? He had a request to make to the Philippian Church: and what was it? Did he desire that they would endeavour to liberate him from his chains? No: he was unmindful of himself, and solicitous only that they should adorn the Gospel. For this "*only*" did he labour; and this "*only*" did he desire.

We notice, in the words before us,

I. His general exhortation—

The standard at which the Christian is to aim, is widely different from that with which the rest of the world are satisfied. We can easily understand that different modes of living would become a prince and a beggar, or a philosopher and a child: we can readily conceive also, that if a company of angels were sent down to sojourn upon earth, and a direction were given them to live suitably to their high station, it would import pre-eminent sanctity in the whole of their conversation. From hence we may form some idea of the exhortation in the text. The Christian is "a citizen

110973

"a citizen of no mean city;" he is a citizen even of heaven itself: and he is to order his life in such a way, as becomes the society to which he belongs[a]. The Gospel is the charter of their privileges, and the directory of their conduct: and they are to walk as becomes,

1. The wonders it unfolds—

[Contemplate the great mystery of redemption: contemplate the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, together with the offices he still continues to execute for his people's good———Contemplate the favour with which the Father regards them in and through his beloved Son———Contemplate the love of the Holy Spirit, who condescends to make their polluted bodies and souls his habitation, in order that through his gracious influences they may be made meet for the inheritance of the Saints in light———What kind of a life do such mysteries of love and mercy require? Should not our souls be lost, as it were, in wonder, love, and praise?———]

2. The profession it calls us to—

[We profess to be "as lights in the world," "as cities set on a hill:" we profess to be "born from above," to be "transformed into the Divine image," yea, to be "changed into the Divine image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of our God." In a word, we profess to be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men;" insomuch that no one can behold us, without seeing the mind and will of God exhibited in living characters before his eyes. What then is the conversation suited to such a state? Is a mere negative holiness sufficient, or a lukewarm performance of religious duties? Who will behold *God* in such a conduct as that? If we are to exhibit Christ to the world, we must "walk altogether as Christ walked:" his tempers, his spirit, his conduct, must be ours———]

3. The benefits it confers—

[Take a distinct view of these; survey the pardon of sins unnumbered, the peace that passeth understanding, the strength for every duty, the access to God on all occasions; the joy unspeakable and glorified, the prospects opened in a dying hour, the crowns and kingdoms reserved for us in a better world———What manner of persons ought *we* to be, who have such mercies vouchsafed unto us? Does it become such persons to be weighing out their services by drachms and scruples, if we may so speak? Should we not "love and serve God with *all* our heart, and *all* our mind, and *all* our soul, and *all* our strength?" The continual habit of our minds should be, "What shall I render unto the Lord?"———]

But,

[a] This is the precise idea of πολιτεύεσθε.

But, that we may not spend all our time in mere *general* truths, let us proceed to notice,

II. His particular directions—

A Christian Minister is not like the ostrich, which having laid her eggs in the sand, pays no further attention to them; but like a tender mother, who, after having brought forth her infant, travails with it in birth a thousand times, through her fond solicitude for its welfare[b]. If present with his people, he watches over them with care; if absent from them, he anxiously inquires respecting their state. To see good in them, and to hear it of them, is, next to his personal enjoyment of God, his chief happiness. He can say with truth respecting them, "I live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." Now, amongst the various blessings which he desires them to enjoy, there are two in particular, to which we would call your attention;

1. An union of heart among themselves—

[This is essentially necessary to the welfare of any Church: if there be dissentions and divisions among them, there will soon be confusion and every evil work. And where shall we look for union, if not among the household of God? Have they not all one faith, one hope, one baptism, one God and Father? Are they not all members of one body, all animated by the same Spirit, all heirs of the same glory? It was from these very considerations that the Apostle urged the Ephesian Church to cultivate an humble, meek, forbearing, and forgiving temper, and to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;" and, as in the text, made it his one request to them, when he was a prisoner at Rome[c]. Of how much importance he thought this temper to be, we may judge from what he himself says in a few verses after the text: we cannot conceive language more tender, or motives more powerful, or intreaties more urgent, than he there addresses to them[d]; and the one point that he there presses upon them is, that they would be "like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, and of one mind."

This then we would impress upon your minds as a matter of indispensable necessity. There will of course, amongst a number of persons whose former views, habits, and dispositions have been so different, arise many occasions of difference, perhaps also of dissatisfaction and disgust: but Christians should regard the smallest symptom of disunion, as they would the beginnings of a conflagration in the house wherein they dwelt: every one should have his

[b] Gal. iv. 19. [c] Eph. iv. 1—6. [d] Phil. ii. 1, 2.

his personal feelings swallowed up in an attention to the common cause. All should have one object, and unite their efforts to accomplish it, and banish in an instant whatever might obstruct their exertions for the general good. That this will sometimes be attended with difficulty, is implied in the very exhortation to "*stand fast* in one spirit:" but it *may* be done; and, if our hearts be right with God, it *will* be done.]

2. A zealous attachment to the faith of Christ—

[Many things there are which may operate to turn us from the faith of Christ. That which the Apostle more especially had in view, was the dread of persecution[e]: and certain it is, that the fear, not only of death, but even of an opprobrious name, causes many to draw back from their holy profession. But we must "take up our cross daily, and follow Christ;" yea, we must "follow him boldly without the camp, bearing his reproach." In this holy fortitude we should all unite: for, the defection of one has a tendency to weaken all the rest. "*With one mind* therefore we should *strive together* for the faith of the Gospel." We should endeavour to preserve in our own souls a love of the truth, and in every possible way to recommend it to those around us. We should bear in mind the benefits which we hope to receive from the Gospel, and the obligations we have to hold fast our profession of it: and we should determine, through grace, to seal it (if need be) even with our blood.

We must be careful, however, not to spend our zeal about the circumstantials of religion, or to cloke a bigoted attachment to a party under a pretence of love to Christ: it is the Gospel itself, and the blessed truth which it unfolds, that we are to contend for; and for that we are to be ready to lay down our lives.

To hear of these two things, an orderly and affectionate agreement among themselves, (like that of a well-disciplined army;) and a stedfastness in the faith of Christ, is the greatest joy of a Minister, when, by the providence of God, he is for a time removed from them[f]: in reference to both of them, therefore, we would address you in the language of the Apostle, "Brethren, dearly beloved and longed-for, my joy and crown, *so* stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved[g]."]

[e] ver. 28. [f] Col. ii. 5. [g] Phil. iv. 1.

MXXXIX.

SUFFERING FOR CHRIST'S SAKE A GIFT OF GOD.

Phil. i. 29. *Unto you it is given, in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.*

THE chief obstacles to a holy and consistent conduct

duct arise perhaps from within, from the evil propensities of our own hearts. But very serious difficulties are occasioned by the frowns and menaces of an ungodly world. We are naturally afraid of suffering; and are easily deterred from those things which would subject us to heavy trials. But if we considered the cross as a badge of honour, as a source of good, and as a high favour conferred upon us by God himself, we should feel less anxious to avoid it, and be more emboldened to walk as becometh the Gospel of Christ. It is by this view of sufferings, that the Apostle encourages the Philippians to hold fast their profession without wavering. His expressions are singularly bold and striking: they shew us,

I. That suffering for Christ's sake, is a favour conferred on us by God himself—

Believers are called to suffer for Christ's sake—

[In addition to the sufferings which are common to others, the Believer is called to endure contempt, and reproach, and persecution, for the Gospel's sake. He is taught to expect them[a]: and experience proves, that however amiable, or useful, or discreet he may be, he cannot avoid the odium attaching to true religion.]

But his sufferings are a gift from God himself—

[As far as respects his persecutors, his trials arise from a malignant effort of men and devils to obstruct the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom: but as far as respects God, they are a special gift from him. As the faith, on account of which he suffers, is given him, so also are the sufferings themselves, together with the ability to endure them patiently. They are bestowed purely for Christ's sake[b]; and are appointed in number, weight, and duration, so as to conduce most effectually to his eternal welfare.]

We may observe further concerning his cross,

II. That it is a richer gift than even faith itself—

Faith is certainly an inestimable gift; yet the gift of suffering for Christ's sake is far greater—

1. It

[a] Matt. v. 10—12. 1 Cor. iv. 13. 2 Tim. iii. 12.

[b] We may conceive Christ soliciting the greatest of all favours on behalf of a beloved Disciple; and, on being desired by his Father to specify it, replying, "Father, I ask that he may have the honour of suffering for me:" which the Father graciously condescends to grant.

1. It is a higher privilege in itself—

[In believing, we *receive from God* all the blessings which we stand in need of: but in suffering, we *give to God*: we give our name, our property, our liberty, our life, to be disposed of in any way which may tend most to his glory. What an honour is this, for a poor creature, a worm of the earth, to confer a gift on God himself! Surely, much as we are indebted to God for the gift of faith, the giving us an opportunity to honour him should be esteemed a far richer obligation, nor should any thing that we possess be of any value in our sight, if we may but have the honour of sacrificing it for his sake.]

2. It is a nobler testimony for God—

[When we believe, we bear testimony for God that his word is true, and that not one jot or tittle of it shall ever fail. But when we suffer for him, that testimony is far more plain and unequivocal. We then declare, not only that God is good and true, but that he is deserving of all that we can possibly do for him; that there is no service so hard, but we should cheerfully engage in it; no suffering so severe, but we should cheerfully endure it for his sake. Hence it is said, that while "by his enemies God is evil spoken of, on the part of his suffering friends he is glorified."]

3. It is a more instructive lesson to the world—

[We cannot exercise faith in Christ, but we must by that very act convey instruction to those around us. We exhibit somewhat of that change which takes place in the converted; and are, as it were, "epistles of Christ known and read of them," who would not read the Scriptures themselves[c]. But by suffering patiently for Christ's sake, we speak more loudly in their ears: we force them to inquire, [e]What inducements we can have to make such sacrifices? and, Whence we derive our ability to sustain such trials? And so efficacious have been the examples of many while enduring the torments of martyrdom, that their very persecutors have been overcome, and converted to God.]

4. It is a clearer evidence of grace—

[Many have believed the Gospel, while yet their hearts were not upright before God. They have been convinced in their judgment, but not converted in their souls[d]. The same observation may apply also to some who have suffered for the Gospel's sake[e]. But a patient enduring of trials for Christ's sake is certainly a very strong test of sincerity. It gives reason to hope, that we have attained some measure of conformity to Christ, and that "the Spirit of glory and of God resteth on us[f]." There may indeed be some corruptions yet remaining to be mortified, which leave

[c] 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3.
[d] John ii. 23, 24. Acts viii. 13, 20, 21.
[e] Gal. iii. 4.
[f] 1 Pet. iv. 13, 14. with ver. 28.

leave room for doubt respecting the present safety of the soul; but if we combine a zealous endeavour to mortify them, with a cheerful submission to the cross of Christ, we shall have a favourable testimony from God[g], and a happy issue to our present conflicts.]

5. It is a richer mean of glory—

[The smallest portion of *real* faith has the promise of eternal life[h]: and in this view it may be thought superior in value to every thing else. But suffering for Christ's sake is the means of augmenting that glory: it brings a recompence proportioned to the sufferings that are endured[i], and "works out for us, light and momentary as it is, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory[k]." Now as health is a richer blessing than life, because it implies well-being as well as mere existence, so a patient suffering for Christ's sake must be accounted of more value than faith, because of the super-eminent degrees of happiness to which it eventually exalts the soul.]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who *fear* sufferings—

[It is painful to flesh and blood to bear the cross: but what must be the consequence of shunning it? Will not our ease be dearly purchased? Ah! think of the fate that awaits "the fearful[l]," and tremble lest the preservation of your life for a season issue in the loss of it to all eternity[m].]

2. To those who *feel* them—

[Faint not, nor be discouraged. Would you deprecate what Christ has asked for you, and what is given you in his behalf? He who confers on you the honour of suffering for him, will endue you with strength to bear your trials, yea, to rejoice and glory in them[n]. Only view your sufferings in their true light, and you will rejoice that you are counted worthy to bear them[o]. And, when you shall be joined to that blessed company "who came out of great tribulation[p]," you shall not regret one loss that you sustained, or one pain that you endured. The approbation of your judge, and the increased weight of glory which shall be awarded to you, shall soon wipe away your tears, and turn all your sorrows into joy.]

3. To those who *occasion* them—

[Little do you think against whom you fight. You imagine that you are only opposing weak enthusiasts; but so thought Saul, when, in fact, he was persecuting Christ himself[q]. Know, that "whosoever

[g] Rev. ii. 2—7.
[h] John iii. 36.
[i] Heb. xi. 26. Mark x. 29, 30.
[k] 2 Cor. iv. 17.
[l] Rev. xxi. 8.
[m] Mark viii. 35.
[n] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.
[o] Acts v. 41. Jam. i. 2, 12.
[p] Rev. vii. 14.
[q] Acts xxvi. 15.

"whosoever toucheth the Lord's people, toucheth the apple of *his* eye[r];" and that "it were better for you to have a millstone hanged about your neck, than that you should cause one of his little ones to stumble[s]." Be sensible then of your guilt and danger: embrace the doctrine which you have been labouring to destroy[t]: and, instead of opposing, labour to advance, the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom.]

[r] Zech. ii. 8. [s] Matt. xviii. 6. [t] Gal. i. 23.

MXL.

UNITY RECOMMENDED.

Phil. ii. 1, 2. *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

THE Church of Christ is one great family; all its members being children of one common Parent, and partakers of one common interest. To consult the good of the whole is the duty of each; no one regarding his own personal gratification, but all combining for the common welfare. This was a favourite topic with the apostle Paul. The care of all the Churches having been committed to him, he had constant occasion to inculcate the necessity of union amongst the multifarious and discordant characters of which the different Societies were composed. The manner in which he inculcates it in the words before us, is very remarkable, and deserves particular attention. In opening the passage to your view, we shall be led to notice,

I. The object of his desire—

He was now in prison at Rome: but his sufferings caused no diminution in his concern for the welfare of the Church of God. He saw with grief the efforts which were made by the enemies of Christ to turn aside the Philippians from the faith they had embraced; and he *therefore* urges them the more carefully to preserve amongst themselves an unity of sentiment and affection, in order that they might give no advantage to their adversaries by intestine divisions. The object,

I say,

I say, which he desired to promote, was unity of sentiment and affection—

This appears to be the true scope and import of his words: "Being joined together *in love*, be united also *in sentiment*: and being joined together *in sentiment*, be united also *in love*, so as to have *one soul penetrating the whole body*[a]." An unity in these respects is, it is true, very difficult to be attained—

[Considering how the human mind is constituted, it is scarcely to be expected men should be perfectly agreed upon any point; and least of all upon religion, where the subjects themselves are so deep and mysterious, and where so great a scope for difference of sentiment is afforded by the terms in which the truth is revealed. There is not unfrequently *in appearance* an opposition between the things that are revealed: (I say *in appearance*; for it is not possible that there should be any *real* contrariety in things which have been delivered by inspiration of God:) and it may be expected that different persons will lean to different sides, according to the weight which the different positions appear to have in the general scale of truth. Besides, the deep things of God are discerned only by means of a spiritual perception imparted to us by the Spirit of God: and of course they will be more or less justly viewed, according to the measure of grace that has been given to us, and according as our visual organs have been purified from the films that obscure or distort the truth.

Of course, an unity of affection must be considerably impeded by these circumstances: for we naturally agree best with those whose sentiments we approve; and if there be any great diversity of sentiment on important topics, we are apt to feel a proportionable alienation of heart from the person in whom it exists.]

But though a perfect union in these respects is difficult, it is, as far as is necessary for all practical purposes, certainly attainable—

[We are expressly taught that it *should*, and *may*, exist in the different members of Christ's mystical body[b]——— The way to attain it is, to confine ourselves to the fundamentals of religion; and to make them the bonds of union; whilst the less evident or less important truths are left as neutral ground, open alike to either party, and to be occupied or not by each, as they see fit. What the fundamentals are, may, it is true, be differently stated: but, if Christianity be viewed in its true light as *a remedy*, and we agree in *the depth of the malady* it is proposed

[a] See the original, which consists rather of two parts than of four, and should be construed accordingly.

[b] 1 Cor. i. 10.

posed to cure; *the means of healing*, through the atoning blood of Christ, and the influences of his Spirit; and *the duty of those who are healed*, to devote themselves unreservedly to the service of their God; if, I say, Christianity be viewed in this light, there will be very little difference of sentiment between those who have ever felt its efficacy. It is by going beyond these plainer truths; by laying an undue stress on some less obvious doctrines, without suffering them to be tempered with those which are of an opposite aspect; by wresting from their plain import those passages which we cannot reconcile with our favourite systems; and, in a word, by exercising a dogmatical spirit on points which are beyond our comprehension, and forming them into the shiboleth of a party; it is by these things that the Church of Christ is divided: and never till we return to the simplicity of the day of Pentecost, shall we regain its unity. But when we return to the docility of little children, we shall, to all practical purposes, "see eye to eye."]

On the attainment of this object his heart was set, as appears from,

II. The urgency of his request—

The first consideration which he urges is, the happiness which such an union would confer on him—

[He had rejoiced in their first conversion to God; as a mother does over her new-born infant: but his joy was blended with much anxiety for their future welfare. That welfare was now endangered by the efforts which were made to separate them from each other, and to turn them from the faith. Nothing but their stedfastness could comfort him: but, if he should see them cordially united together in sentiment and affection, it would complete his joy. Hence he says to them, "Fulfil ye my joy." His very life seemed to be bound up, as it were, in the prosperity of their souls; so that in effect he says to them, as he does to the Thessalonian Church, "Now I live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." If therefore they felt in any degree their obligations to him, they could not but labour to carry into effect the object which would so conduce to his happiness.]

To this he adds all the most powerful pleas that could operate upon the human mind—

["Is there any consolation in Christ?" As Believers, they could not but know that there was in him a fund of consolation; a mine, the treasures of which were altogether unsearchable. Who can contemplate the covenant which he entered into for the redemption of a ruined world, together with all that he did to accomplish this stupendous work; his mysterious incarnation, his holy life, his meritorious death, his glorious resurrection and ascension, his intercession for us at the right hand of God, and his

exercise

exercise of all power as the Head of his Church, and as the life of every Believer in it; who can contemplate all this, and not be comforted in the thought of such a Saviour, and in the hope of such a salvation? The greatness of his person, the suitableness of his undertaking, the sufficiency of his work, and his fidelity to all his promises—where can consolation be found, if not in these?

But what enjoyment can any have of these things, if their minds be distracted with controversies, and their hearts embittered with discord? Whatever any may profess to the contrary, it is only when the mists of controversy are dispelled, that the cheering rays of the Sun of Righteousness can penetrate and revive the soul.

The same may be said respecting "the comfort of love." That there is unspeakable comfort in the existence and exercise of love, what Christian does not know? The presence of love argues, and, if I may so speak, constitutes, the in-dwelling of the Deity in the soul: as the loving Apostle has said, "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." But sweet as is the harmony of kindred souls, it cannot long exist, when once the discordant strings of controversy are touched. The voice which but lately delighted with its sounds the ravished ear, loses its interest, when once it has begun to make the Saviour's name a subject of dispute. Diversity of sentiment on such important matters as religion soon creates coolness in the affections, and alienation in the heart. Shall we then willingly admit amongst us a disposition of mind so adverse to our best interests, and so destructive of our truest happiness?

Nearly allied to this is "the fellowship of the Spirit:" for the Church of God is not merely one *family*, but one *body*, every member of which is animated and enlivened with the same soul. The Holy Spirit who pervades them all, produces a holy fellowship between them: between not those only that are contiguous to each other, but those also which are most remote; it unites in one the inhabitants both of heaven and earth. But this also is interrupted by the introduction of discordant sentiments; and the magnetic attractions, by which it brought all under one common influence, cease to operate with effect, and leave the mass of Christians as unconnected and indifferent to each other as the world around them.

Of "bowels and mercies" also the true Christian is possessed. He has felt towards himself the compassions of his God; and he desires to manifest towards all his brethren a measure of the same tender care. But discord shuts up all these tender emotions, and banishes from the mind this affectionate solicitude; so that hostility will take the place of love, and anathemas be hurled, where nothing but mutual endearments have before prevailed. St. Paul probably had more particularly in view the effect which their dissentions would produce upon his own mind: they would

be

be as a dagger to his soul: and could the Philippians, who had so richly participated his love, make such a return? No; if they had any bowels and mercies existing in them, they would avoid a conduct which would so augment the distresses which, for their sakes and for the sake of the whole Church, he was now enduring. God had promised to his people, to "give them *one heart* and *one way*, that they might fear him for ever, for the good of them and of their children after them:" and this unity he besought them, if they valued either their own welfare or his happiness, most strenuously to maintain. He would have them all to be not only one *body*, but to have one *soul*, and one *spirit*, pervading all.]

Earnestly desiring that the same heavenly disposition may abound in you also, I would, with most affectionate intreaty, RECOMMEND,

1. That you guard against every disposition that may interrupt this harmony—

[The Apostle particularly cautions the Philippians against "strife and vain-glory," and exhorts them "in lowliness of mind to esteem others better than themselves." So would I also caution you against the indulgence of a proud, conceited, self-sufficient spirit, which is the bane of all social harmony and Christian love. These malignant dispositions have been at the root of all those animosities which have in different ages disturbed and divided the Church of God[c]——Only let self be mortified and subdued, and love will reign; yea, it will so reign, that your union with your brethren shall resemble that which subsists between the Father and Christ himself[d].]

2. That you seek those blessings which have a sanctifying efficacy on the soul—

[What love will not the consolation that is in Christ inspire? What will not a person who tastes "the comfort of love" do to preserve love; and one who enjoys the "fellowship of the Spirit," to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? If you yearn over the desolations of Zion, and have your "bowels and mercies" moved at the distresses of those around you, you will never willingly contribute to disturb the harmony of the Church by doubtful disputations. You will strive for peace; and in that exercise of love will reap in your own souls the richest reward. Such is the exhortation of St. Paul to the Colossian Church; and such is that with which I shall conclude the present discourse: "Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness, unto which ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful[e]."]

[c] Jam. iii. 14—18. [d] John xvii. 21. [e] Col. iii. 12—14.

MXLI.

THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST.

Phil. ii. 9—11. *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth: and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

WE are told by an inspired Apostle, that the great scope of the Prophecies related to "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." To the same points our attention is continually turned in the New Testament. Sometimes they are stated as an accomplishment of prophecy, and as proofs of Christ's Messiahship: sometimes as grounds of our hope before God: sometimes as motives to stimulate us to duty: sometimes as models, according to which God will work in us: and sometimes as examples, which we are bound to follow: and sometimes as encouragements to follow those examples. It is in this last view that we are to contemplate this stupendous mystery at this time. The Apostle had said, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." To illustrate and enforce this exhortation, he shews how the Lord Jesus Christ had emptied himself of all his own glory, and endured death, even the accursed death of the cross, for the salvation of men: and that in consequence of it he had received such tokens of his Father's approbation as were commensurate with the sacrifice which he had made. In considering this testimony of his Father's love, let us mark,

I. The height to which he was raised—

The Lord Jesus Christ, *as God*, was incapable of elevation: but, *as man*, he was raised from the lowest degradation to the highest degrees of glory.

Amidst the depths of his humiliation he was greatly exalted—

[At his baptism he received an audible testimony from heaven, together with a visible communication of the Spirit of God, in attestation of his Messiahship. In all the miracles he

wrought, a further testimony was borne to him by the Father. And in his last hours, when in appearance he was even deserted by his heavenly Father, universal nature bore witness to him; the sun going down, as it were, at noon-day; the earth rending and quaking to its very centre; and the most convincing evidence being given to all, that he whom they crucified was indeed the Son of God.].

But it was not till after that period that the exaltation spoken of in the text commenced—

[At his resurrection, he was declared to be the Son of God with power ——— At his ascension, he led captivity itself captive, and, surrounded with myriads of holy angels, went to take possession of his Father's throne ——— Seated on that, he is elevated above all the works of God's hands; above men, so as to be "higher than the kings of the earth," even "King of kings and Lord of lords[a]:" and above angels also, "all the principalities and powers of heaven being made subject unto him[b]"———]

The text requires us particularly to notice,

II. The reason of his exaltation—

It was in consequence of his previous humiliation: it was,

1. As a reward of his sufferings—

[In this view it had been promised to him[c]——— In this view he himself looked forward to it with intense desire[d]——— And in this view it was actually conferred upon him[e]———]

2. As the means of completing the work he had undertaken—

[He was to redeem us, both by price, and by power. On this account, after he had paid the price of our redemption, he was invested with "all power both in heaven and in earth;" and "all things were given into his hands," that he might order every thing for the accomplishment of his own will, and the furtherance of the work which he had begun. In him was all fulness treasured up, that he might impart unto his people all needful supplies of grace[f]; and to him was all authority committed, that he might put all enemies under his feet[g]. Thus, by his elevation, are his triumphs and the triumphs of all his people, finally and eternally secured.]

But

[a] Ps. lxxxix. 27. Rev. xix. 16.
[b] 1 Pet. iii. 22. Heb. i. 5, 8, 9, 13.
[c] Isai. lii. 13—15. & liii. 10—12.
[d] Heb. xii. 2. John xvii. 4, 5.
[e] Dan. vii. 13, 14. Heb. i. 3, 4.
[f] Eph. i. 20—22.
[g] 1 Cor. xv. 25. Ps. cx. 1, 2.

But we have further to notice his exaltation in reference to,

III. The end of it—

It was that he might be the one object,

1. Of universal adoration—

[Of this he is most worthy, as all the hosts of heaven testify[h]———And it must be paid to him: for God has sworn with an oath, that it shall be paid to him by all in heaven, earth, and hell[i]; or if we will not yield it to him as the voluntary expression of our love, we shall be constrained to acknowledge his right to it, whilst we are suffering under the stroke of his avenging rod[k].]

2. Of unlimited affiance—

[By confessing him to be both Lord and Christ, I understand such a confession as proceeds from unfeigned faith[l]. And to this full affiance is he entitled, both according to his essential nature as God, and in his Mediatorial capacity as the Saviour of the world[m]. In what way it is to be manifested, the Prophet tells us: "Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength[n]." As "the Christ," who died for us, he is our righteousness; and as "the Lord," who is the Head and Governor of all, we receive out of his fulness all needful supplies of grace and strength.

Nor let it be thought that this direction of our regards to him will derogate at all from the honour of the Father: for, on the contrary, it will be "to the glory of God the Father," whose wisdom has devised, and whose love has executed, so wonderful a plan for the salvation of men. On this subject we can have no doubt; since our Lord himself has told us, That God's very design in the whole of this stupendous mystery was, "that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father; and That he who honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who hath sent him[o]."]

BEHOLD then,

1. How awful is the state of those who submit not to him!

[We are equally rebels against him, whether we oppose him as Lord, or as Christ; whether we refuse to submit to his righteousness[p], or to his government. O reflect, ye who are going about to establish a righteousness of your own, What will ye answer to him, when he shall call you to an account for usurping his

[h] Rev. v. 11—13.
[i] Rom. xiv. 11. with Isai. xlv. 23.
[k] Ps. ii. 1—3, 6, 9—12.
[l] Rom. x. 9—11.
[m] Isai. xlv. 22.
[n] Isai. xlv. 24.
[o] John v. 22, 23.
[p] Rom. x. 3.

his office, and making void all that he has done and suffered for you?———And you, who, whilst professing to trust in him as your Saviour, live in disobedience to his commands, where will you hide your heads, when he shall say, "Bring hither those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me?" Whatever ye may now think, ye cannot invalidate the oath of God: he has sworn, that unto him every knee shall bow; and, if ye do it not willingly, ye shall do it against your will, to your everlasting sorrow.]

2. How blessed is the state of his obedient people!

[Shall Christ be exalted to the right hand of God in vain? or will he refuse to impart to you out of his fulness? Fear not; you are committed to his care; and he will not lose one of you; "not one shall ever be plucked out of his hands." Whatever you need, it is treasured up for you in him; and "his grace shall be sufficient for you." It may be, that in his service you may be called to endure many things: but if now "he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied," be assured that ere long it shall be no grief to you that you were humbled for a season: for, "if you suffer with him, you shall also reign with him," and "be glorified together with him[q]" in his kingdom for evermore.]

[q] 2 Tim. ii. 12. Rom. viii. 17.

MXLII.

PRACTICAL RELIGION ENFORCED.

Phil. ii. 14—16. *Do all things without murmurings and disputings; that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.*

THERE are times for laying the foundations of religion; and there are times for raising the superstructure. Neither the one nor the other must be neglected, since they are both equally necessary to the completion of the sacred edifice which is to be erected in the soul. St. Paul paid due attention to them both. "As a wise master-builder, he laid the foundation" with all possible care, declaring, that though an angel from heaven were to announce any other ground of hope than the Lord Jesus Christ, he must not be credited,

credited, but rather must be held accursed. So extreme was his jealousy upon this point, that, when the Apostle Peter sanctioned, by his conduct, a sentiment that militated against the doctrine of salvation by faith, he rebuked him openly before the whole Church. On the other hand, this holy Apostle was not at all less jealous respecting the performance of good works. In all his Epistles, he inculcates the indispensable necessity of them, in order to our final happiness; and in most of them he enters very minutely into the different duties which we are to perform to God, our neighbour, and ourselves. In the beginning of this chapter he had recommended lowliness of mind[a]; which he afterwards enforced from the example of Christ[b]. He here continues the same subject, and inculcates a constant exercise of humility towards both God and man, as the best means of adorning our profession, and of securing to ourselves the blessedness which we look for in the eternal world. Pride fosters in the soul a murmuring disposition towards God, and a contentious disposition towards man. Humility counteracts them both. Hence he says, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings;" engage in every thing with a mind full of submission to God, and of love to man; that whatever difficulties you may have to contend with, there may be nothing in your conduct unworthy of your high and holy profession; nothing that shall endanger your eternal welfare.

To enter properly into the subject before us, it will be necessary for us to consider,

I. The principles which are here assumed—

Notwithstanding his jealousy on the subject of faith, he does not hesitate to declare,

1. That the practical efficacy of religion should be the chief object of our attention now—

[It was so to the Jews of old. They possessed the highest privileges as God's chosen people, and had ordinances divinely appointed for their stated observance: yet neither their privileges nor their observances availed them any thing, without holiness of heart and life: their circumcision, whilst they were disobedient to

[a] ver. 3, 4. [b] ver. 5—8.

to the law, was as uncircumcision. To those who boasted that they were Abraham's seed, and therefore children of God, our Lord said, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham;" and, "If God were your Father, ye would love me." To the same test must our pretensions also be brought. It is in vain for us, to "cry Lord, Lord, if we do not the things which our Lord commands." It is by our obedience to his will that our blessed Lord estimates our love: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me;" and again, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." On keeping of God's commandments, so great a stress is laid, that it is made the one discriminating point between the children of God and the children of the Devil. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God[c]." Nor is any profession or privilege available for our eternal welfare without it: for "circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping the commandments of God[d]."]

2. That it will be the chief object of inquiry at the day of judgment—

[If the Gospel produce not this effect, it is preached in vain; and they who dispense it, "labour in vain." As now the tree is judged of by its fruits, so will it be "at the day of Christ." In the account given us by our Lord himself, we are forewarned what will be the grounds of his decision, when he shall judge the world: those whose religion was productive of good works, will be approved and rewarded in proportion to their works: but those who lived in the neglect of good works, will be disapproved and punished. Whatever professions any may have made of faith and love, they will be brought to this test; and according to it will they be justified or condemned. Doubtless respect will be had to the principles from which their works have proceeded: for "God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart:" but the works of all will be viewed as evidences of their internal dispositions, and will form the ground of the judgment which shall be pronounced upon them.]

These principles being established, let us proceed to consider,

II. The practice which is here inculcated—

We must not undervalue what may be called *negative* holiness; for, in truth, it is that which constitutes in a great measure the excellence of the Saints. The absence of a murmuring disposition, is to a certain degree

[c] 1 John iii. 6—10. [d] 1 Cor. vii. 19. & 1 John i. 6. & ii. 7.

degree the same as positive contentment; and the absence of a contentious disposition as positive love. But it is not a low degree of these virtues that we are to seek after:

We should walk as lights in a dark world—

[It would ill become "the Children of God" to walk as Children of Belial: on the contrary, they should be patterns to the whole world; and should "give no occasion whatever to their enemies to speak reproachfully." They should be "blameless and harmless, and without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse world." Nor let this be thought a low attainment. Considering what an ensnaring world we move in, and what depraved and perverse creatures we have to deal with, it is no easy matter so to walk that no man may have any fault to find with us but concerning the law of our God. Such conduct requires incessant vigilance and circumspection on our part, and no small measure of grace from the Lord Jesus Christ. In this way we should shine as lights in a dark world, "holding forth" in the whole of our conduct and conversation "the word of life." On every side of us there are rocks and quicksands, which prove destructive to thousands, who navigate this tempestuous ocean: and, whilst endeavouring to avoid them ourselves, we should so steer our course, as to perform the office of lights, or *light-houses*, to others; that they, following our luminous path, may escape the dangers that surround them, and reach in safety the haven of rest. This is the true view in which Christians should consider themselves: they are intended to be witnesses for God, and "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men." They are so to walk, that others may see clearly in them a transcript of the mind and will of God; and that, conforming themselves to their example, they may advance daily in the paths of righteousness and grace.]

This alone will answer the end of Ministerial exertions—

[Pastors are appointed for the perfecting of the Saints: and unless this be accomplished by the word, it is preached in vain: instead of proving to the hearers "a savour of life unto life, it will be to them a savour of death unto death." Till a Minister beholds this change wrought in his people, he must of necessity stand in doubt of them[e]: but when it is wrought in them, he may well rejoice over them, seeing that they shall surely be his joy and crown of rejoicing in the last day[f]. Yes; blessed indeed will be the meeting which he will have with them in that day: he will recognise them as his spiritual Children, and present them unto God, saying, Here am "I, and the children thou hast given me."]

In CONCLUSION, I will,

1. Guard against any misapprehension of this subject—

[Though

[e] Gal. iv. 11, 19, 20. [f] 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

[Though we affirm that our works will be the ground of God's judgment in the last day, we would not be understood to intimate, that there is, or can be, any merit in our works. It is not for any worthiness in them that we are saved, but solely for the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, and brought in an everlasting righteousness for our justification before God. Our works, it is true, will be the test by which our sincerity will be tried, and the standard to which the measure of our reward will be conformed: but it is not for our blamelessness that we shall be accepted; nor will any thing be conferred upon us on the ground of merit: the whole will be a reward of grace, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through his obedience unto death. It is highly necessary that this matter should be clearly seen, lest our very virtues become a snare to us, and we perish at last by rejecting the salvation provided for us.]

2. Give directions for attaining the state to which we are called—

[It can be attained only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: for it is only by faith that we can be united to him, and only by union with him that we can bring forth fruit to his glory. He himself tells us, that "without him, that is, separate from him, we can do nothing." If we attempt any thing in our own strength, we shall fail. But "through Christ strengthening us, we can do all things." To him therefore we must look; and of him we must say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Relying on him, we shall never be confounded. Our trials may be great; but we shall be enabled to bear them: our difficulties may be great; but we shall be enabled to surmount them. Nothing shall be impossible to us, if only we live by faith in him. In the midst of temptations we shall "be preserved blameless," and our "light shall shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."]

MXLIII.

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN DELINEATED.

Phil. iii. 3. *We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*

IT is much to be lamented that the nature of genuine Christianity is but little understood. An assent to the fundamental articles of our faith, and a conformity to certain rites and ceremonies, are thought sufficient grounds for concluding ourselves real Christians, notwithstanding we are plainly warned by God himself that

that religion does not consist in these things[a]. Persons may be, and often are, very zealous advocates for the externals of religion, while they are altogether destitute of its life and power. Such were those whom St. Paul calls, not the sheep of Christ, but "dogs;" not saints, but "evil-workers;" not the circumcision, but, in a way of contempt, "the concision," because all their piety consisted in a zeal for the cutting of the flesh. Against such persons he *thrice* enjoins us to "beware;" and then contrasts with theirs the character of the true Christian.

There are three discriminating points which distinguish the circumcision, or the true Christians, from all who are Christians only in name and profession:

I. They worship God in the Spirit—

[Many never bow their knees before God at all. What they are, they themselves shall judge. Others observe the form of prayer both in public and in private; but their hearts are not engaged; nor is there any difference in their frame, whether they confess their sins, or ask for blessings, or acknowledge benefits received. All their services are without life, and without devotion.

The true Christian, on the contrary, though not always in the same frame, "worships God in the Spirit," that is, not only with the inmost affections of his soul, but through the direction and assistance of the Holy Ghost[b]. If we could see him in his closet before God, we should often behold him bathed in tears, and with hands and eyes lifted up to heaven imploring mercy at the hands of God. His thanksgivings too are not an unmeaning compliment, but an heartfelt grateful acknowledgment, suited in a measure to the mercies he has received. He "pours out his soul before God[c]," and "stirs up himself to lay hold on God[d]," and says, like Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me[e]."

Let us examine to which of these classes we belong — — — and we may know infallibly what is our state before God.]

II. They rejoice in Christ Jesus—

[The world have their joys, such as they are, arising from the things of time and sense. Some know no happiness but in lewdness and intemperance. Others moving either in a continual round of fashionable amusements, or in the pursuit of wealth or honour, find all their pleasure in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. Others more rationally seek their happiness in the acquisition of knowledge. While others seem contented

[a] Rom. ii. 28, 29.
[b] Jude 20. Rom. viii. 15, 26.
[c] Ps. xlii. 4. 1 Sam. i. 15.
[d] Isai. lxiv. 7.
[e] Gen. xxxii. 26.

contented to move, like a horse in a mill, in the same round of daily occupation, without aiming at any thing further than an exemption from trouble, and an easy passage through life.

But the true Christian, while he is alive to all the joys that are possessed by others, *as far as they are pleasing to God, and profitable to his soul*, has joys of a far higher nature. He has felt his need of mercy, and has found mercy through Christ Jesus. Hence the very name of "Jesus is precious to him:" and the richest gratification he can possibly enjoy is, to contemplate the glory and excellency of his Beloved. He does not indeed always feel the same delight in the Saviour; but his richest consolations and sublimest joys arise from this source, insomuch that all the pleasures of sense are nothing in his eyes in comparison of one hour's fellowship with the Son of God[f]. Indeed he would not wish to be happy when he is at a distance from his Lord: in such a state he would consider happiness rather a curse than a blessing. But in whatever state he be with respect to temporal things, a sight of his adorable Saviour will render him completely happy[g].

Here again let us inquire into our own experience. We need no surer test of our state than that before us. Let us examine ourselves with care——and "the Lord give us understanding in all things!"]

III. They have no confidence in the flesh—

[The ungodly world, if in prosperity, "make gold their confidence[h]," and "trust in their uncertain riches[i]." If, on the other hand, they be in adversity, they look no higher than to their own exertions, or than to their earthly friends to deliver them. The same creature-confidence pervades all their spiritual concerns: they "lean altogether on an arm of flesh," and trust in their own goodness or repentance to recommend them to God, and their own strength and resolution to fulfil his will.

The true Christian is the very reverse of this. We say not that he has no bias towards these evils, for his old nature still remains within him: but his views with respect to these things are altogether altered; and, though he neglects not any means which are proper to be used, he trusts in God only to maintain his prosperity, or to restore it when he has been pleased to afflict him with any calamity. With respect to his soul also he has no hope but in God. To the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus he trusts for every blessing. In the atoning sacrifice and prevailing intercession of Jesus he confides, as the ground of his acceptance with his reconciled God. On the all-powerful grace of Christ he relies, as that which alone can enable him to subdue his enemies, and to serve his God. Feeling that he is in himself ignorant, guilty, polluted, and enslaved, he renounces all self-confidence, and makes Jesus

[f] Ps. iv. 6. [g] 1 Pet. i. 8. [h] Job xxxi. 24.
[i] 1 Tim. vi. 17.

Jesus his wisdom, his righteousness, his sanctification, and redemption.

Surely there can be no difficulty in ascertaining our proper character, if only we will make this point also a matter of serious self-examination — — —]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who, according to these distinctions, must be considered as devoid of real Christianity—

[Remember who it is that cuts you off from the number of true Christians: it is not man, but God, even that God who will judge you in the last day according to his own word. O continue not in such a state! but seek that circumcision of the heart which, though condemned by men, shall ultimately have praise of God.]

2. Those who have reason from the foregoing remarks to hope that they are Christians indeed—

[What reason have you to bless God for the mercies that have been vouchsafed to you! But remember, it is not by past experience merely you are to judge, but by the continued habit of your mind. Rest not satisfied with any thing you have known; lest you "begin in the Spirit, and end in the flesh." The text does not characterize the Christian by what he has done, but by what he yet does: and therefore "press forward, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto what is before:" and "as you have received how to walk and to please God, so endeavour to abound more and more."]

MXLIV.

STEDFASTNESS IN GOD.

Phil. iv. 1. *My brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.*

St. PAUL was a man of feeling, a man of love. He felt for all: for those whom he saw perishing in sin, he would willingly have endured all that men or devils could inflict, if only it might be instrumental to their salvation[a]. For those who belonged to Christ, even though they had never seen his face in the flesh, he had great conflicts, striving if by any means he might promote their eternal welfare. But towards those who had been converted by his Ministry, he felt as a father towards his children: he could say, "God is

[a] Rom. ix. 3.

is my record how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ[b]." To such is this epistle addressed; as indeed the words of our text clearly evince. Such an accumulation of tender expressions can scarcely be found in the same space in all the Book of God. But what is the drift of them all? Why does he so labour to convince the Philippians of his love, and to conciliate their regards to him? it was, that they might be stirred up to give the more earnest heed to his exhortations, and to "stand fast in the Lord."

To be "in the Lord" is the character of every Believer: he is united unto Christ by faith, and is engrafted into him as a branch of the living vine. But our blessed Lord cautions us again and again to "abide in him," and warns us against the danger of separation from him[c]. In like manner we are frequently exhorted to "stand fast in the Lord;" and so to continue in the faith grounded and settled, that we may not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel."

To you then we would now address the exhortation, and say, Stand fast in,

I. Your allegiance to him—

Many things will conspire to draw you away from Christ—

[The world, with its vanities on the one hand, and its terrors on the other, will assault you continually——the flesh also will operate to bring you into subjection to all its basest lusts——Nor will Satan be idle: he, with all his confederate hosts, will strive, by innumerable wiles and temptations, either to subvert your principles, or to vitiate your practice——It is a warfare into which you are brought, when once you enlist under the banners of Christ; and you must expect all manner of conflicts to your dying hour.]

But you must be stedfast in your adherence to him—

[You must be "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," and never cease to fight till you have obtained the victory. Neither hopes nor fears, neither joys nor sorrows, must be suffered to alienate you from him, or to damp your zeal in his service. True it is that the Lord gives you many great and precious promises, that he will keep you, and that nothing shall ever separate you from his

[b] Phil. i. 8. [c] John xv. 1—6.

his love[d]. But this is not to encourage supineness; but rather to make you more earnest in your application to him for protection and support. With the example of Demas before you, you should never cease to fear, lest you also should "fall from your own stedfastness[e]," and "be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ[f]." Aware of your danger, you must "fight the good fight of faith," and "cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart." "You must be faithful unto death, if ever you would obtain the crown of life."]

Stand fast also in,

II. Your dependence on him—

From this also you are in danger of being drawn—

[There is in us a continual proneness to self-confidence and self-dependence. We are ever ready to lean to our own understanding to guide us——— our own righteousness to justify us ——— our own strength to preserve us——— It is a great matter to have the soul brought to a simple reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ for every thing.]

But we must live altogether by faith on Christ—

[He is "Head over all things to his Church," and has all fulness of blessings treasured up in him for our use[g]. "He is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;" and from him must we receive them all[h], that in, and by, and for all, His name may be glorified[i] ———]

Nor must any thing be suffered to weaken,

III. Your expectation of his future advent—

To that day there is a particular reference in the preceding context[k]—

We are apt to lose sight of that awful day—

[This is evident, from the remissness and negligence with which the things of eternity are pursued. Could we be dull and slothful with that day before our eyes? ——— Could the allurements or terrors of the world have any influence upon our hearts, if we knew and saw that the Judge was at the door? ———]

But we must stand continually in a state of preparation for it—

[To wait for Christ's second coming is the habit of mind to which every Believer is brought[l]: and in proportion as it is formed in the mind, is the progress which we have made in the divine life[m]. We should not give way to sloth, like the foolish Virgins;

[d] Rom. viii. 35—39.
[e] 2 Pet. iii. 17.
[f] 2 Cor. xi. 3.
[g] Eph. i. 22, 23. Col. i. 19.
[h] John i. 16.
[i] Isai. xlv. 24, 25.
[k] Ch. iii. 20, 21.
[l] 1 Thess. i. 9, 10.
[m] 1 Cor. i. 7.

Virgins; but have "our loins girt, and our lamps trimmed, and ourselves as those who wait for the coming of their Lord." We should look forward with a holy longing for that day, as the termination of all our conflicts, and the consummation of all our joys[n]——and comfort ourselves with the assured expectation that then we shall be ever with the Lord[o]. With that period before our eyes, we shall "be diligent to be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless[p]."]

Permit me, in CONCLUSION, to urge this matter, after the example of the Apostle in my text——

[n] Tit. ii. 13. 2 Pet. iii. 12. [o] 1 Thess. iv. 17, 18. [p] 2 Pet. iii. 14.

MXLV.

CHRISTIAN MODERATION.

Phil. iv. 5. *Let your moderation be known unto all men: the Lord is at hand.*

TO lay the foundation of a sinner's hope, is the first duty of a Minister: but he must proceed to raise the superstructure also, even such a practice as the Gospel is intended ultimately to produce. The Apostle doubtless felt it a privilege to insist on joy in the Lord; "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again, I say, rejoice:" but he felt no less the importance of inculcating the duty of moderation with respect to all the things of time and sense; since without that it would be impossible for any one to maintain that high exercise of mind which joy in the Lord imports. It is by a conformity to this latter precept, no less than by his obedience to the former, that the true Christian will be distinguished. In fact, this precept enters very deeply into the divine life: and it is only in proportion as its influence is exhibited in our lives, that we have any satisfactory evidence of our conversion to God.

That it may operate effectually on our hearts, let us consider the two parts of which it consists;

I. The duty enjoined—

The word which we translate "moderation," imports such a kind of meekness and gentleness as results from an indifference to the world, and a superiority to all

all the things of time and sense. Perhaps our language does not contain any word of precisely the same import: but the Apostle's meaning is sufficiently conveyed by the term that is here used. We should have a calm composed state of mind in reference to all things here below; and maintain a constant "moderation,"

1. In our hopes and fears—

[We are apt to magnify the importance of approaching events, and to have our feelings agitated by prospective good or evil, far beyond what they would be by the actual existence of the things foreseen. Good is regarded by us without its manifold circumstances of alloy; and evil without its attendant consolations. In reality, as it is something future that is the main-spring of action to the whole world, so it is by anticipation, rather than by actual experience, that the happiness of mankind is chiefly affected. We say not this in relation to things *spiritual and eternal;* for in reference to them the very reverse is true: the circumstance of their being future and invisible diminishes, and almost destroys their influence upon the mind: but in reference to things of a *temporal* nature it is so: upon *them* our imagination exerts all its energies: it paints them in colours of the liveliest or deepest hue; and draws from them by far the greatest portion of its pleasures or its pains. The man whose ambition is fired by prospects of distinction, the heir who looks forward with uncertainty to the possession of an inheritance, the lover who seeks to be assured of a reciprocity in the object of his affections, what pictures do not these persons draw of happiness, if they shall attain, or of misery, if they shall lose, the object of their desire! But such extravagant feelings ill become the Christian: his desires should be curbed by a sense of the vanity of all earthly things, and their utter insufficiency to make us happy. He should commit himself, and all that pertains to him, to the disposal of an all-wise Providence; and leave it to God "to give, or to take away," as he shall see fit; prepared in either case to bless and glorify him for the dispensation. In a word, he should "be without carefulness," "casting all his care on God who careth for him." This lesson our blessed Saviour teaches us in his Sermon on the Mount[a]——— and to have a practical experience of it in our souls is one of the highest attainments of the Christian.]

2. In our joys and sorrows—

[Though it is true, that the mass of mankind are chiefly influenced by what is future, yet there are circumstances wherein a few give up themselves altogether to their present emotions. The

[a] Matt. vi. 25—34.

The voluptuary imagines that he cannot drink too deep of the cup of pleasure; and the mourner, that he cannot yield too much to the anguish of his mind. Both are alike deaf to good advice: the one refuses to be counselled; the other, to be comforted. But "moderation" is the frame which best befits the Christian. He is not insensible to the feelings of humanity; nor is he forbidden to rejoice or grieve, according as the one or other of these emotions is suited to his state. But an equableness of mind is that which he should cultivate under all circumstances: he should not suffer himself to be too much elevated or depressed by present things. His joy should be in God: his sorrows should be chiefly called forth by his own short-comings and defects: and he should be so filled with a sense of the infinite importance of things eternal, as to rise superior to all the vanities of this lower world. St. Paul, in a few verses after the text, informs us how he was affected by the changes which he experienced: "I have learned," says he, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need[b]." Thus it should be with us also: we should be like men of another world, mere pilgrims and sojourners here; thankful for the accommodations which we meet with on the road; and not cast down, if we find some inconveniences; but mainly intent on our journey to a better country, and studious to improve all present circumstances so as most to advance us in our meetness for the heavenly inheritance.]

3. In our spirit and conduct—

[There is in mankind at large, a very undue degree of confidence, both as to the sentiments they embrace, and the line of conduct which they pursue. Every one is ready to fancy himself infallible, and to account all deceived and perverse who differ from him. Hence arises, in the generality, a vehemence in asserting their own opinions, and an intolerance towards those who differ from them. But this disposition of mind must be studiously avoided by every true Christian. There should be in the whole of our sentiments and demeanour, a diffidence which inclines us to suspect ourselves, and a candour which disposes us to make all due allowance for others. Doubtless it becomes us to be thoroughly persuaded in our own minds, and to act agreeably to that persuasion: but still we should allow to others the same liberty which we claim for ourselves, and be content that others should think and judge for themselves, without desiring to impose upon them any restrictions of our own. How happy would it have been for the Christian world, if such moderation had obtained in the Church, from the period of its first establishment in the Apostolic age! But man is a tyrant, and loves to be a law to his fellow-

men,

[b] ver. 11, 12.

men. Few are disposed to distinguish aright between things essential, and things indifferent. If it were said to them that contrarieties may both be right, it would appear a paradox inexplicable. But so it is, and so it is declared by God himself to be, in many things which have most divided men, and called forth against each other their bitterest invectives. The contests about observing days, or eating things offered to idols, how violent they were in the Apostolic age! How severely did the weak condemn the strong! and how acrimoniously did the strong despise the weak! yet both the one and the other, so far as they acted to the Lord, were accepted of him, whether they exercised, or forbore to exercise, the liberty which they possessed[c]. The same thing at this moment obtains amongst the various Denominations of Christians throughout the world. It were difficult to enumerate them all: yet all are as confident of their own exclusive sentiments and habits, as if they had a special revelation from Heaven that they alone were right: and the very idea of an unity of action among them, even in things wherein they are all agreed, is by many reprobated as an unbecoming indifference towards their own peculiar party. But is this the "moderation," that is productive of meekness, and gentleness, and love? No: it is a spirit most contrary to real Christianity, and most studiously to be shunned by all who would adorn their Christian profession. The true temper to be cultivated, is that of the apostle Paul, who, "though he was free from all, became the servant of all, that he might gain the more[d]."]

Such is the duty here enjoined. Let us now consider,

II. The argument with which it is enforced—

The nearness of death and judgment is a common argument with the Apostles, in support of their various exhortations: and it is fitly applied on this occasion: for we may well be "moderate," in relation to all earthly things, when we consider how speedily the Lord is coming,

1. To terminate all the things of time and sense—

[Whatever we have here below, it is but of short duration: whether we are visited with comforts or afflictions, they are all both light and momentary, and therefore unworthy of any serious regard. Let any one look back upon his past life, and see how transient have been both his pleasures and his pains: they are all passed away like a dream; and little remains of them but the bare remembrance that they once existed. Shall we then suffer our minds to be so affected with earthly vanities, as if they were to endure for ever? No: we should sit loose

[c] Rom. xiv. 1—6. [d] 1 Cor. ix. 19—22.

loose to them, not elated by the enjoyment of them, nor depressed by their loss. This is what we are taught by infallible authority: "This I say, Brethren," says the Apostle; "The time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: *for the fashion of this world passeth away*[e]!"]

2. To assign to each that portion which his peculiar case requires—

[The end for which God sends to us a diversity of dispensations is, that we may improve them all for the good of our souls. Our improvement of the various talents committed to us will be particularly inquired into, and form the ground of the sentence that shall be passed upon us. To pass that sentence, our Lord is just ready to come: and therefore the only thing which ought materially to affect us should be, not so much the quality of the dispensations, as the improvement that we make of them. Look, for instance, at the Rich Man and Lazarus: how little remains to them of the comforts or sorrows which they experienced on earth! What is the rich man the better for all his sumptuous fare; or the poor man the worse for all his penury and want! But the use which they made of their respective dispensations, *that* is now the only thing worth a thought. So it will soon be with us: the things which here appeared so important, will have altogether vanished away, and nothing will remain but responsibility for the improvement of them. I say then to all, "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth:" and in the prospect of your Lord's second advent to judge the world, be moderate in relation to all present things, whether pleasing or afflictive[f], and let it be your one concern to "be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless[g]." Let your moderation too be so constant and abiding, that it may "be known unto all men." True it is, that moderation is not of itself calculated to attract notice: it is, in its very nature, unobtrusive and retired. But where it so prevails as to regulate the heart and life, it of necessity diffuses a holy light around us, and serves, by the contrast it exhibits, to gain the admiration of the world. Men gaze and are astonished, when they see we are not under the power of earthly things, as others are: and they are constrained on such occasions to confess the wisdom and excellence of our ways. Thus then let our moderation operate under all circumstances, whether prosperous or adverse: and then shall the efficacy of Divine grace be acknowledged, and "God shall be glorified in us."]

[e] 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.
[f] 1 Cor. iv. 3—5.
[g] 1 Pet. iv. 7. & 2 Pet. iii. 14.

MXLVI.

A DISSUASIVE FROM CAREFULNESS.

Phil. iv. 6, 7. *Be careful for nothing: but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God: and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

MAN is a prospective creature: he is able to look into futurity; and to give, as it were, a present existence to future things. Indeed, it is from anticipation that his greatest joys and sorrows flow. This faculty of foresight is that which eminently distinguishes him above the rest of the creation. Other creatures equal him in actual enjoyment; but he alone can overleap thousands of intervening years, and derive pleasure or pain from the contemplation of distant events. It is to this faculty that the Scriptures are principally addressed. They set before us the final issue of present things; and declare, that our conduct in this life shall meet with a suitable recompence in the eternal world. Thus, by the hope of good and the fear of evil, they stimulate us to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life.

But though this power is capable of being turned to such advantage, yet, through the corruption of our hearts, it is too generally abused. Men look only at things visible and temporal, instead of looking also at things invisible and eternal. Moreover, their expectations of future good are generally too sanguine; and their apprehensions of future evil weigh more upon their spirits than the occasion requires. Hence arises in their minds an excessive "carefulness," which it is the design of Christianity to counteract.

In the words which we have just read, we have,

I. A dissuasive from carefulness—

By "carefulness" we are not to understand, *attention;* for that is absolutely necessary to the discharge of our duties in the world: but we are to understand, *anxiety;* which, as far as it prevails, argues a state of mind that is injurious to ourselves, and displeasing to God.

The

The great occasions of anxiety may be reduced to three;

1. Some good desired—

[Men, in different situations of life, have their hearts set upon such things, as may possibly be attained by them, and such as they imagine will conduce greatly to their happiness. Some are eagerly pressing forward to the attainment of honour: others are insatiable in their thirst for gain. Some are altogether wrapped up in an idolatrous attachment to a fellow-creature; others are disquieted, like Rachel[a], and Hannah[b], because they are disappointed in the hopes of a family.

But all such anxieties are sinful. We may *desire* the good things of this life: but our desire must be subordinated to the will of God: and, while we use the proper means of attaining our wishes, we must use them with an entire submission to the disposals of his Providence.]

2. Some evil dreaded—

[Evils foreboded, are often more painful, than when actually endured. They not unfrequently press with such a weight upon the mind, as to incapacitate men for the exertions, which would serve at least to mitigate their trials, if not altogether to avert them. For instance, men are sometimes so overcome with the apprehensions of a heavy loss, that they are unable to prosecute with attention their proper business, whereby the loss, if sustained, might be in time retrieved. And it is no uncommon thing, to find men sacrificing their honour, their conscience, yea, their very hopes of salvation, in order to avert some impending calamity.

But it would not be thus, if we considered every thing, even "the falling of a sparrow," as regulated by an all-wise God. We might endeavour with propriety to prevent an evil; but we should never be so intimidated by its approach, as to be driven from our dependence on God, or induced to violate our duty to him.]

3. Some trouble felt—

[When trouble is heavy or accumulated, whether it be from disease in our persons, or embarrassment in our circumstances, or the loss of some dear relative, how ready are we to give ourselves up to sorrow, as if our wound were incurable, and our misery irremediable! The instances are not few, wherein men are so overwhelmed by their afflictions, as to have their intellects impaired, and to be reduced to a state of mental derangement. Yea, even worse effects than these are sometimes produced by trouble: for the unhappy sufferers take refuge in suicide; and plunge their souls into hell, to rid themselves of their temporal distresses.

We are not forbidden to give way to grief. The Saviour himself

[a] Gen. xxx. 1. [b] 1 Sam. i. 5—10.

self wept at the tomb of his friend. But are there to be no bounds to grief? Should not our sorrow be moderated by the consideration, that the cup is put into our hands by a gracious Father, and that, if drunk in submission to his will, it shall be sanctified to our eternal good? Such excessive "sorrow" is prohibited in the text; and well it may be; since "*nothing*" can warrant it, and its operation is so injurious.]

While the Apostle thus dissuades us from carefulness, he prescribes,

II. An antidote against it—

Prayer is no less our privilege than it is our duty—

[God is ever ready to hear the prayers of his people; and he expects that we should "by prayer and supplication make our requests known to him." Not that he needs to be informed by us; for "he knoweth our necessities before we ask [c]:" but we ought to specify our wants, in order the more deeply to impress a consciousness of them on our own minds, and to make us duly sensible of our dependence on him, and of our obligation to him when our prayers are answered. On all occasions we should have recourse to prayer: "In *every thing* we should make our requests to God;" in doubt, for direction; (for he will direct our paths [d];) in difficulties, for succour; (for he will give grace sufficient for us [e];) and in wants, for supply; (for he has engaged that we shall want no manner of thing that is good [f].) Nothing is so great but that he is ready to bestow it; nothing is so small, but that we need to ask it at his hands.

But, together with our prayers, we should always offer also thanksgiving. Our troubles are always mixed with mercies, for which we should pay unto our God a tribute of praise. A living man can have no cause to complain [g]. While we are out of hell, our troubles must be infinitely less than our deserts. We should therefore approach our God with gratitude for mercies received, and with a dependence on him for those we stand in need of.]

This would be an effectual antidote for excessive carefulness—

[If we commune only with a fellow-creature, we find some relief: but if we go to our God, he will enable us to leave ourselves to his gracious disposal, and to "cast our burthen upon him." Our desires will be weakened by a submission to his will; our fears be allayed by a view of his providence; and our troubles be mitigated by the consolations of his Spirit.]

This part of our subject is more fully opened by,

III. A

[c] Matt. vi. 8.
[d] Ps. xxv. 9. Isai. xxx. 21.
[e] Jam. iv. 6. 2 Cor. ix. 8. & xii. 9.
[f] Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10. Matt. vi. 33,
[g] Lam. iii. 39.

III. A special commendation of this antidote—

By carefulness "our heart and mind" is overwhelmed—

[We have before noticed the depression of spirit which results from excessive carefulness: and there is but too much reason to believe, that many really die of a broken heart. But where the effect produced by troubles is not so great, yet the mind is dissipated by them; and the thoughts are distracted, so that we cannot exercise them upon other objects, or even fix them in prayer before God.]

But by means of prayer, our hearts and minds shall be kept in peace—

[None but those who have experienced it, can conceive what peace flows into the soul, when we are enabled to commit our ways to God. The heart that was agitated, becomes serene; and the thoughts that were distracted, become composed: yea, an inexpressible sweetness pervades the whole man, and turns his sorrows into an occasion of joy[h]. "The peace of God," thus infused into the soul, "keeps," as in a garrison[i], both "the heart and mind;" so that if trouble seek to invade us, it can make no impression: not all the good that can be desired, nor all the evil that can be dreaded, nor all the trouble that can be felt, will be able to turn us from our God, or to retard our progress towards heaven.

This blessing comes to us "through Christ Jesus." It is for his sake that our prayers are accepted: it is through him that peace is communicated to us in answer to them: and it is through his agency upon our souls, that this peace becomes a defence against the incursions of care. In short, from Christ Jesus this antidote derives its efficacy; and through him it shall be effectual for the ends for which it is recommended in the text.]

We cannot conclude without OBSERVING,

1. How does religion contribute to men's present happiness!

[Perhaps "carefulness" is a source of more trouble than all other things together. Yet this is taken away, in proportion as we devote ourselves to God. It is true, religion brings with it, if we may so speak, its peculiar sorrows: (not that they spring from religion, but from sin: yet in our fallen state, they certainly are attendant on the exercise of religion.) But godly sorrow is salutary, while "the sorrow of the world worketh death[k]." And, if we live nigh to God in prayer and praise, we shall be freed from the disquietudes which harass and distress the whole world beside; and shall dwell as in a haven of peace, while others are tossed

[h] 2 Cor. xii. 7—10. [i] φρουρήσει. [k] 2 Cor. vii. 10.

tossed to and fro, and are "at their wit's end," upon tempestuous billows. "Commit thy works unto the Lord," says Solomon, "and thy thoughts (not thy *ways* only, but thy *thoughts*, the most fluctuating and ungovernable of all things) shall be established[1]."]

2. What enemies to themselves are they, who live in the neglect of prayer!

[If men desired no more than present happiness, they ought to be constant at a throne of Grace; since it is there alone that they can get rid of their burthens, or obtain peace unto their souls. But the joys and sorrows of men are not confined to this life: they follow us into the eternal world, and abide with us for ever: and that which is the appointed mean of present blessings, is also the only possible mean of everlasting happiness. The burthen of guilt which lies upon us, can never be removed, but by prayer. Peace with God can never be obtained, but by prayer. And they who will not pray, voluntarily bind their own sins upon them, and reject the proffered mercies of their God. Think, ye prayerless people, how your conduct will appear to you at the day of judgment: "Had I prayed, my sins had been forgiven: had I prayed, I had now been happy beyond all the powers of language to express: but the time is past: prayer will not avail me now: my weeping will be fruitless; my wailing irremediable; my gnashing of teeth eternal."

O that we might all awake from our slumbers! O that we might "arise, and call upon our God!" Then should we understand the efficacy of prayer, and experience its benefits both in time and in eternity.]

[1] Prov. xvi. 3.

MXLVII.

EXTENT AND SOURCE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S POWER.

Phil. iv. 13. *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

THERE are in the Sacred Writings many various, and apparently opposite, representations of the Christian's state: he is mournful, yet happy; sinful, yet holy; weak, yet possessed of a derived omnipotence. These paradoxes are incomprehensible to the world at large: but the solution of them is easy to those who know what man is *by nature*, and what he is *by grace*, and what are the effects which flow from the contrary and contending principles of flesh and Spirit. Nothing

can

can be more incredible, at first sight, than the assertion in the former part of our text: but, when qualified and explained by the latter part, it is both credible and certain: yea, it presents to our minds a most encouraging and consoling truth.

In elucidating this passage, we shall shew,

I. The extent of a Christian's power—

Using only such a latitude of expression as is common in the holy Scriptures, we may say concerning every true Christian, that he can,

1. Endure all trials—

[In following his Divine Master, he may be called to suffer reproaches, privations, torments, and death itself. But "none of these can move him." When his heart is right with God, he can "rejoice that he is counted worthy to suffer shame for his Redeemer's sake[a]:" he can "suffer the loss of all things, and yet count them but dung[b]:" under extreme torture, he can refuse to accept deliverance, in the prospect of "a better resurrection[c]:" he can say, "I am ready to die for the Lord's sake[d];" and when presented at the stake as a sacrifice to be slain, he can look upon his sufferings as a matter of self-congratulation and exceeding joy[e].]

2. Mortify all lusts—

[Great are his inward corruptions; and many are the temptations to call them forth: but he is enabled to mortify and subdue them[f]. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," are very fascinating: but "the grace of God, which has brought salvation to his soul, has taught him to deny them all, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world[g]." "By the great and precious promises of the Gospel, he is made a partaker of the Divine nature[h]," and is stirred up to "cleanse himself from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God[i]."]

3. Fulfil all duties—

[Every different situation brings with it some correspondent duties: prosperity demands humility and vigilance; adversity calls for patience and contentment. Now the Christian is "like a tree that is planted by the rivers of water, and bringeth forth its fruits *in its season*[k]." It is to this change of circumstances that the Apostle more immediately refers in the text: "I have learned," says he, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound:

[a] Acts v. 41. [b] Phil. iii. 8. [c] Heb. xi. 35.
[d] Acts xxi. 13. [e] Phil. ii. 17, 18. 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.
[f] Gal. v. 24. [g] 1 John ii. 15, 16. with Tit. ii. 13, 14.
[h] 2 Pet. i. 4. [i] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [k] Ps. i. 3.

abound: everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full, and to be hungry; both to abound, and to suffer need. *I can do all things*[l]." The Christian knows that all his duties are summed up in love to God, and love to man: he is assured, that no changes in his condition can for one moment relax his obligation to approve himself to God in the execution of these duties: and he endeavours to avail himself of every wind that blows, to get forward in his Christian course.

But in reference to all the foregoing points, we must acknowledge, that all Christians are not equally advanced; nor does any Christian so walk as not to shew, at some time or other, that "he has not yet attained, nor is altogether perfect[m]." We must be understood therefore as having declared, rather what the Christian "*can* do," than what he actually does in all instances. "In many things he still offends[n];" but he aspires after the full attainment of this proper character: in the performance of his duties, he aims at *universality in the matter, uniformity in the manner*, and *perfection in the measure* of them.]

The Christian's power being so extraordinary, we may well inquire after,

II. The source from whence he derives it—

The Christian *in himself* is altogether destitute of strength—

[If we consult *the Scripture representations* of him, we find that he is "without strength[o]," and even "dead in trespasses and sins[p]." Nor, after he is regenerate, has he any more power that he can call his own; for "in him, that is, in his flesh, dwelleth no good thing[q]."

If *our Lord's assertion* may be credited, "without him we can do nothing;" we are like branches severed from the vine[r].

If *the experience of the most eminent Apostle* will serve as a criterion, he confessed, that he "had not *of himself* a sufficiency even to think a good thought; his sufficiency was entirely of God[s]."]

His power even to do the smallest good is derived from Christ—

["It has pleased the Father, that in Christ should all fulness dwell[t]," and that "out of his fulness all his people should receive[u]." It is he who "strengthens us with all might by his Spirit in the inner man[x]:" it is he who "gives us both to will and to do[y]." If we are "strong in any degree, it is in the Lord, and in the power of *his* might[z]." Whatever we do,

[l] ver. 11—13.
[m] Phil. iii. 12.
[n] Jam. iii. 2.
[o] Rom. v. 6.
[p] Eph. ii. 1.
[q] Rom. vii. 15, 18, 19.
[r] John xv. 5.
[s] 2 Cor. iii. 5.
[t] Col. i. 19.
[u] John i. 16.
[x] Eph. iii. 16.
[y] Phil. ii. 13. Heb. xiii. 21.
[z] Eph. vi. 10.

do, we must give him the glory of it, saying, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me[a]:" "I have laboured; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me:" "by the grace of God I am, what I am[b]."

Nor is it by strength *once* communicated, that we are strong; but by continual communications of grace from the same overflowing fountain. It is not through Christ who *hath strengthened*, but who *doth strengthen* us, that we can do all things[c]. We need fresh life from him, in order to the production of good fruit; exactly as we need fresh light from the sun, in order to a prosecution of the common offices of life. One moment's intermission of either would instantly produce a suspension of all effective industry.]

2. From that source he receives all that he can stand in need of—

[Christ is not so prodigal of his favours, as to confer them in needless profusion: he rather apportions our strength to the occasions that arise to call it forth[d]. He bids us to renew our applications to him; and, in answer to them, imparts "grace sufficient for us[e]." There are no limits to his communications: however "wide we open our mouth, he will fill it[f]." He is "able to make *all* grace abound towards us, that we, having *always all*-sufficiency in *all* things, may abound unto *every* good work[g]:" he is ready to "do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think[gg]." "If only we believe, *all* things shall be possible unto us[h]:" we shall be "able to quench *all* the fiery darts of the devil[i]," and "be more than conquerors over *all* the enemies of our souls[k]."]

The USES to which we may apply this subject, are,

1. The conviction of the ignorant—

[Many, when urged to devote themselves to God, reply, that we require more of them than they can do; and that it is impossible for them to live according to the Scriptures. But what ground can there be for such an objection? Is not Christ ever ready to assist us? Is not omnipotence pledged for our support? Away with your excuses then, which have their foundation in ignorance, and their strength in sloth. Call upon your Saviour; and he will enable you to "stretch forth your withered hand:" at his command, the dead shall arise out of their graves; and the bond-slaves of Sin and Satan shall be "brought into the liberty of the Children of God."]

2. The encouragement of the weak—

[A life

[a] Gal. ii. 20. [b] 1 Cor. xv. 10. [c] ἐνδυναμοῦντί.
[d] Deut. xxxiii. 25. [e] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [f] Ps. lxxxi. 10.
[g] 2 Cor. ix. 8. [gg] Eph. iii. 20. [h] Mark ix. 23.
[i] Eph. vi. 16. [k] Rom. viii. 37.

[A life of godliness cannot be maintained without constant watchfulness and strenuous exertion. And there are times when "even the youths faint and are weary, and the young men utterly fall." But "if we wait upon our God we shall certainly renew our strength, and mount up with wings as eagles[l]." If we look "to Him on whom our help is laid[m]," the experience of David shall be ours: "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul[n]." Let not any difficulties then discourage us. "Let the weak say, I am strong[o];" and the stripling go forth with confidence against Goliath. Let us "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus[p]," and "his strength shall assuredly be perfected in our weakness[q]."]

[l] Isai. xl. 30, 31. [m] Ps. lxxxix. 19. [n] Ps. cxxxviii. 3.
[o] Joel iii. 10. [p] 2 Tim. ii. 1. [q] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

MXLVIII.

PRAYER FOR GROWTH IN GRACE.

Col. i. 9—13. *We do not cease to pray for you, that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*

UNIVERSAL benevolence will begin to shew itself wherever Christianity gains a just ascendancy. This is particularly observable in the prayers which the Apostle offered for others; the fervour and fulness of which clearly proved, that they proceeded from a heart fraught with love, and deeply impressed with the excellency of those blessings which are provided for us in the Gospel. He confined not his attention to the welfare of a few with whom he might happen to sojourn; but extended it to the whole Church, as well to those whom he had never seen, as to those amongst whom he had ministered. He needed only to be informed that a work of grace was begun in any persons, and he instantly felt an union of heart with them, and took a lively

lively interest in all that concerned them. This remark is strongly exemplified in the prayer before us. He had heard of the blessed state of the Colossian Church; and, from the instant he had received the glad tidings, he remembered that people in all his stated prayers: and, in the passage before us, he tells them what he prayed for on their behalf. He desired that they might advance,

I. In the knowledge of God's will—

[The "knowledge of God's revealed will" is the foundation of all acceptable obedience: and every Christian must of necessity be in some degree endued with it. But he will not be satisfied with a scanty measure of it: he wishes to be "filled with it," so that it may engage all the faculties of his mind. Not that he can rest in a speculative view of divine truth, however clear or comprehensive it may be: the knowledge which he covets, is a practical and experimental knowledge; a knowledge that diffuses "a spiritual savour" over his soul, and enables him to conduct himself, "with all wisdom," as well in his secret conflicts with sin, as in the public exercises of his duty to God and man.

Such then was the Apostle's first request for the converts at Colosse: he desired, that, as they already had some knowledge of God's will, so they might be "filled" with it, enjoying at the same time its sweet savour, and its practical influence, "in all wisdom, and spiritual understanding."

And should not such be our prayer also for ourselves? Let us not forget, that, while we aspire after Divine knowledge, we must chiefly seek that which brings a feast to the soul, and endues it with a nice and accurate discernment of good and evil.]

II. In obedience to his commands—

[The more enlarged views the Christian has of Divine truth, the more studious will he be to fulfil the will of God. And in his endeavours after holiness he will propose to himself the highest *measure* of obedience, and the noblest *end*. He will not limit himself to the rules prescribed by men; nor will he aim merely at obtaining eternal happiness: but he will consider the relation he bears to God, and the obligations he has received from him, and the expectations which he has of future benefits; and will endeavour to "walk worthy of" such a Father, such a Redeemer, such an unspeakable Benefactor. He will resemble a dutiful and affectionate servant, who does not merely consider what he *must* do in order to escape censure, and receive his wages, but what will please his Master. He inquires with himself, What will please my God? *That* is the great object of his ambition: *that* is the spring of his activity: and with that view he endeavours to be "fruitful,"

"fruitful," not in some good works only, but "in every good work," however difficult or self-denying.

Suited to these dispositions was the Apostle's prayer: he desired for the Colossians what he knew they desired for themselves, even "that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work." And it is certain, that in proportion as we have attained a just knowledge of God's will, we shall desire, both for ourselves and others, an increase of righteousness and true holiness.]

III. In the enjoyment of his presence—

["The knowledge of God" seems to be different from "the knowledge of his will," that has been before mentioned: the former relates to a view of his truth, and the latter to the enjoyment of his presence. In this sense the latter is not a mere repetition, but a blessing intimately connected with a holy life. Whom will God meet, and unto whom will he reveal himself, but "him that rejoiceth in working righteousness[a]?" Yes; there are manifestations which such persons shall receive, and such manifestations as the world can form no idea of[b]. God will "shed abroad his love in the heart" of his people; and will testify to them their adoption into his family, and seal them unto the day of redemption. How desirable is this for every saint! and how rich a recompence is it for any self-denial he may exercise in the path of duty! Would to God that all professing Christians might experience this; and that not a single day might ever pass, in which they cannot say with the beloved Disciple, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ[c]!"]

IV. In submission to his dispensations—

[The more any person lives in the enjoyment of God, and a diligent performance of his will, the more must he expect to be hated and persecuted by an ungodly world. But under all his trials he must be "patient:" to whatever length of time they be protracted, he must be "long-suffering:" nor must he merely possess his soul in patience; he must have it blended "with joyfulness," accounting it his honour and his happpiness that he is counted worthy to suffer shame for his Redeemer's sake[d]. But "who is sufficient for these things?" It is not possible for feeble man to maintain such a conduct, unless he be "strengthened with all might" by the Holy Ghost: yea, there must be such an exertion of omnipotence as will serve for a bright display of "his glorious power;" nor can any thing less than this effect so great a work.

Here then again we see the suitableness of the Apostle's prayer: for if we cannot serve the Lord without participating his cross,

[a] Isai. lxiv. 5. [b] John xiv. 21, 23. [c] 1 John i. 3.
[d] Acts v. 41.

cross, or sustain by our own power the trials that will come upon us, what alternative remains, but either to abandon our profession, or to implore such help from God as shall make us more than conquerors over all?]

V. In thankfulness to him for his mercies—

[There can be no state, however afflictive, in which a Christian ought not to abound in thanksgivings to God. The Israelites, to whom he divided Canaan by lot, were unspeakably indebted to him: but how are *they* indebted, to whom he has given an "inheritance among the saints in light;" even in heaven, where they dwell in the immediate presence of their God! For this they are rendered "meet;" (for it is impossible that they can enjoy it, if they possess not a meetness for it:) their heavenly Father has "delivered them from the power of darkness," even as he did Lot from Sodom, and the Israelites from Egypt, with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm: he has moreover "translated them into the kingdom of his dear Son," and brought them into a cheerful and unreserved obedience to his will: must not *they* then give glory to their God? What if they be burning at the stake, ought they not to rejoice that God has rescued them from hell, and that they are entering on a state of uninterrupted everlasting happiness?

Surely no Christian should rest short of this attainment: but we should all unite in wrestling with our God, till he pour out his Spirit upon us, and form us to the model which was here proposed for the Colossian converts.]

INFER,

1. How glorious are the Christian's privileges!

[Did the Apostle incessantly ask of God what God was not willing to bestow? No: "if we opened our mouth wide, he would fill it;" and all these graces should abound in us, to the praise and glory of our God. What then must the Christian be, in whom these things are found! O Believer, aim not at low things; but aspire after the highest measures of wisdom, purity, and joy.]

2. How dependent are we upon our God!

[It is not at our first commencement only of a religious course that we depend on God, but to the latest hour of our lives. We can have no knowledge, holiness, or joy, but as we receive it from him. Let us then make our requests known to him, and depend on him for all seasonable supplies of grace and strength.]

3. How great is the benefit of intercession!

[We certainly are not sufficiently apprised of this. But when we recollect the intercessions of Abraham for Sodom, of Lot

for

for Zoar, and of Moses for Israel, how can we be so remiss in this duty! Let us incessantly plead for each other, knowing that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."]

MXLIX.

SANCTIFICATION THE END OF REDEMPTION.

Col. i. 21—23. *You, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled, in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable, and unreprovable in his sight; if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.*

OF all the subjects that can occupy the human mind, there is not one so great and glorious as that of Redemption through the incarnation and death of God's only-begotten Son. It is that which occupies incessantly the heavenly hosts; and which the Apostle Paul, whatever be his more immediate subject of discourse, reverts to on every occasion: and when he has, however incidentally, touched upon it, he scarcely knows how, or when, to leave it. This very strongly appears in the passage now before us. Having in the beginning of this chapter thanked God for bringing the Colossians to the knowledge of his Gospel, and informed them what were the peculiar blessings which in his daily prayers he sought for in their behalf, and what thanksgivings he constantly offered up, especially for that which they had experienced in being "translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son," he launches forth into the praises of the Lord Jesus Christ for all that he had done in the creation, preservation, and redemption of the world, and particularly for his redeeming love, as manifested to, and exercised upon, the Colossian converts. But, as they were converts from the Gentile world, we may fitly consider his address to them as delivered also to us; and may take occasion from it to shew,

I. What the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us—

1. Our state was awful in the extreme—

["We

["We were alienated from God, and enemies to him in our mind by wicked works." This is no less true of us than of the idolatrous Gentiles: for though by calling ourselves Christians we have professed a regard for God and his Christ, we have not really sought our happiness in God: we have not even desired his favour, or used any means to obtain it. We have been contented to live at a distance from him, to put the very remembrance of him far from us, and to seek our happiness in things which had no proper tendency to endear either him to us, or us to him. However observant we may have been of outward forms, we have had no pleasure in communion with him. The exercises of prayer and praise have rather been an irksome task, than occupations in which we found our chief delight. And if at any time we have had opportunities of becoming better acquainted with God and with his holy will, we have not been forward to avail ourselves of them: and if instruction on the subject of his Gospel has been proffered to us, we have rather turned away from it, as distasteful to us, than listened to it as pleasing to our souls. The very light which would have revealed him to us, has been offensive to us; and we have turned our eyes from it, as bringing to our view an object, whose presence was to us a source of pain.

Nor is this all. We have been "enemies to him;" yea, "enemies to him in our mind:" we have had a decided aversion to his law: instead of contemplating it as "holy, just, and good," we have viewed it as imposing a yoke that could not be endured. And this hatred to it has been proved by our actual rebellion against it: our "wicked works" have shewn clearly enough that the service of sin was more congenial with our minds than the service of our God. As for all the sublime duties which it inculcates, we have lived in a wilful neglect of them: and of innumerable evils which it forbids, we have lived in the daily and habitual commission — — — Such had been the state of the Colossians in their time of unregeneracy; and such is the state of every Child of man, till he is renewed by God in the spirit of his mind.]

2. But the Lord Jesus Christ has interposed to deliver us from it—

["He has reconciled us to God in the body of his flesh through death." Yes: the Son of God himself has left the bosom of his Father, and assumed our flesh, that in the very nature which had sinned he might bear the penalty that was due to sin, and expiate our guilt by his own blood. The sacrifices under the law were substituted in the place of the offender, and they surrendered up their life as an atonement for his sins: and through the death of the victim in his stead, the sinner was reconciled unto his God. So the Lord Jesus Christ has offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world; and

effected

effected reconciliation for all who believe in him. No longer does God look with anger upon his enemies, when with penitential sorrow they implore mercy for Christ's sake. Not one of their trespasses will he ever impute to them: their iniquities, how great or numerous soever they may have been, are "blotted out by him as a morning cloud," and "cast behind his back into the very depths of the sea." This we are authorized to declare: for "God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation," and commanded us to proclaim to the whole universe, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them[a]."]

But, that we may not be deceived by a partial view of this mystery, I will pass on from what he has done, to shew,

II. What was his ultimate design in doing it—

Whatever compassion the Lord Jesus felt for our fallen race, and however desirous he was to deliver us from destruction, he had other objects in view, that were not a whit less dear to him, and without which indeed his dying for us could never have prevailed to make us happy—

The restoration of our souls to the Divine image was in his more immediate contemplation—

[Man by the Fall was despoiled of holiness, as well as happiness; and without a restoration to the former, could never repossess the latter. Indeed God could never re-admit him to his presence: nor could he, if admitted into heaven, find any satisfaction in the sight of a holy God, or any pleasure in the employments which constitute the felicity of the heavenly hosts. To restore man therefore to the image which he had lost, was one great end of Christ's incarnation and death; as St. Paul has said, "He gave himself for us, to redeem us not from punishment merely, but from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works[b]." In another passage the Apostle comes more immediately to the point, and says, "Christ has loved his Church, and given himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish[c]." This passage shews, that the expressions in my text relate not to our justification before God, but to the *sanctification* of our souls; to which Christ has had a view in all that he has done and suffered for us.]

And

[a] 2 Cor. v. 19, 20. [b] Tit. ii. 14. [c] Eph. v. 25—27.

And this he will effect for all whom he reconciles to God—

[He will impart of his Spirit to the soul: he will strengthen the soul for all its conflicts: he will enable all his people to "mortify their earthly members," and to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts:" nor will he ever cease to work in them, till he has transformed them into his own image, and can "present them unblameable and unreprovable in the sight of God." We are not indeed to suppose that he will so renew them as to render them perfectly sinless; for the flesh will continue to lust against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh, to the latest hour of our lives[d]: but he will so make the spiritual principle triumphant in the soul, as to leave in us no *allowed* sin, and so that he may present us to God as "Israelites indeed in whom there is no guile."]

In this, however, there must be the concurrence and co-operation of the Believer himself; as will appear whilst I shew,

III. What is necessary to be done on our part, in order to secure the blessings which he has obtained for us—

Those who are addicted to system would alter the translation here, and read it, not, "*if* ye continue," but "*since* ye continue." But this is only one instance of many, wherein the advocates for human systems betray their determination to make every thing bend to their views. The Translators of our Scriptures would indulge no such unhallowed partiality. They would in no case wrest the Scriptures to make them favour a party in the Church. They maintained a child-like simplicity; and with scrupulous fidelity laboured to transmit to us the Scriptures in a perfect agreement with the inspired original. Of the propriety of the translation in this place I have no doubt: it is the very language of the Scriptures, in a thousand other places as well as this; and it speaks to us a most important truth, namely, that we never can be presented blameless before God at last, unless we continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.

1. It was by faith that we first obtained an interest in Christ—

[It

[d] Gal. v. 17.

[It would have been to no purpose that Christ had died to reconcile us to God, if we had not on our part believed in him as our Mediator and Redeemer. The unbelieving world who die in their sins, are rather plunged the deeper into perdition, than delivered from it, by the intervention of Christ. Their rejection of him has aggravated their guilt exceedingly: and the word preached to them in his name, will be "a savour of death unto all, to whom it is not a savour of life." The receiving of him into our hearts by faith, put us into possession of all the blessings which he had purchased for us.]

2. By the continued exercise of the same faith we must ultimately secure the harvest of which we have reaped the first-fruits—

["As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so we must walk in him[e]." We must "continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel." It is a fact, that many do make shipwreck of the faith. The Scriptures abound with instances of it: and we also shall feel many temptations, both from without and from within, to follow their sad example. Like the stony-ground hearers, we may through the influence of persecution "fall away:" or, as in the case of the thorny-ground hearers, the good seed in us may be so choked by the cares and pleasures of this life, as to "bring forth no fruit to perfection." And, from whatever source the defection arises, "if we turn back, we turn back unto perdition," and "God's soul shall have no pleasure in us." Would we then be "presented faultless before the presence of God's glory with exceeding joy[f]?" we must "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering:" we must be more and more "grounded" in the faith by a constant exercise of it on every occasion: we must be so firmly "settled" in it, that a man may as well attempt to pluck the sun from the firmament, as to shake either our faith or hope. This is the way to "endure unto the end;" and it is in this way only that we can fulfil that salutary injunction, "Look to yourselves, that ye lose not the things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward[g]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Are there any who are here yet unreconciled to God?

[Oh! think what a mercy it is that God's wrath has not broken forth against you to your utter and everlasting destruction! Think how many of the human race are now suffering the penalty due to their sins in hopeless sorrows, and in torments of which we have no conception. Do not, I intreat you, let the efforts made for your salvation be in vain. Let not "Christ have died in vain;" and "receive not the grace of God in vain:" but "to-day,

[e] Col. ii. 6, 7. [f] Jude 24. [g] 2 John 8.

day, whilst it is called to-day, harden not your hearts, lest you provoke God to swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest."]

2. Are there here those whom God has reconciled to himself?

[How can you ever adore him as you ought to do? Can you reflect on the means he has used for your redemption; can you reflect on his laying your iniquities on the person of his only dear Son, and not bless him? The wonder is, how you can find a moment for any other employment; and that you are not, like the lame man whom Peter and John healed, leaping, and dancing, and praising God every day and all the day long.

But, if this were the frame of your mind, I should still point you to a more excellent way of glorifying your heavenly Benefactor. You have seen that the Lord Jesus, in dying for you, sought "to present you to God holy, and unblameable and unreprovable in his sight:" let his object then in redeeming you be the one object at which you shall aim through the remainder of your lives. And remember, that it is not sufficient that you be unblameable and unreprovable *before men;* you must be so "in the sight of God" also, even of that "God who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins." Let your secret walk with God be such as he will approve. Let your every temper, and disposition, and habit, mark the friendship that subsists between God and you. And let every day be so spent, as if at the close of it you expected your soul to be required of you, and to be presented by your Saviour to your reconciled God.]

ML.

PREACHING CHRIST.

Col. i. 28. *Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in Christ Jesus, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*

THE mystery of the Gospel was first made known to Adam in Paradise: but in process of time the real scope of it was forgotten; and nothing of it remained, but the rites whereby it was shadowed forth. To Abraham a plainer revelation of it was given; and to Moses, a complete system of types, which were to illustrate the Gospel in all its parts. Still, however, the views which men had of it were obscure: the design of the ceremonial law itself was very imperfectly understood; and the idea of all men being saved through the crucifixion of the incarnate Deity, was almost as new to the Jews,

in

in the Apostolic age, as to the Heathens themselves. Hence St. Paul speaks of it as "hid from all preceding ages and generations," and as then for the first time "manifested to the saints." That the memory of it might continue to the end of time, and its benefits be universally diffused, our blessed Lord appointed an order of men, whose sole business should be to spread the knowledge of it throughout the world. Amongst these St. Paul was a very distinguished instrument. He both laboured more abundantly, and suffered more severely, than any other of the Apostles. What this "gloriously rich mystery" was, in what way he dispensed it, and for what ends, he informs us in the words of our text; wherein we see in few words the *subject*, the *manner*, the *scope* of his ministrations.

Let us consider,

I. The great *subject* of his ministrations—

We need not consult other passages any further, than to illustrate and confirm that which is before us; since the Apostle tells us in the very words preceding the text, that he was chiefly occupied in setting forth "Christ as the hope of glory." This he did in two points of view;

1. As dying for us—

[The words might be translated, "Christ *among*[a] you the hope of glory." But whether we change, or retain, the present translation, we are sure that the death of Christ as an atonement for sin was that which he chiefly insisted on. He expressly tells us so in another place[b], and declares that he had fully "determined to know and preach nothing else[c]."

This he affirmed to be the only hope of sinful man: that it was that which made satisfaction to Divine justice, and procured our reconciliation with his offended Father[d]: that nothing could be added to it to render it more effectual[e]: and that if ever we attained to happiness and glory, it must be entirely through the merit of his all-atoning sacrifice[f].]

2. As living in us—

[Though the sufficiency of the death of Christ for our salvation was the principal subject of the Apostle's preaching, yet the

[a] ἐν is so translated, a few words before, "*among* the Gentiles."
[b] 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. [c] 1 Cor. ii. 2. [d] ver. 21, 22.
[e] Gal. v. 2, 4. [f] 1 Cor. iii. 11.

the in-dwelling of Christ in the soul by his blessed Spirit was necessarily connected with it; and the two points together formed the sum and substance of all his ministrations. He often speaks of Christ "dwelling in us[g]," and "living in us[h]," and "being our very life[i]:" and in the text he says, that "Christ *in* us is the hope of glory."

The necessity of this he urged with as much care and earnestness as the atonement itself: because "without Christ we could do nothing[k]," yea, we must continue reprobates[l], and for ever destitute of any interest in his salvation[m].]

The subject of his ministrations being ascertained, let us notice,

II. The *manner* in which he conducted them—

He left nothing undone which could promote the reception of the Gospel:

1. He "warned every man"—

[He was faithful to the trust reposed in him; and, without either courting the favour of men or fearing their displeasure, he boldly commended himself to the consciences of all. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, he persuaded men[n]. He told them freely of their lost estate, and their utter incapacity to help themselves. He set before them the provision which God had made for them in Christ Jesus; and in the most pointed terms assured them, that "if they neglected that great salvation, they could never escape" the wrath of God[o]. If any, yea if even an angel from heaven should attempt to substitute another Gospel, or alter in any respect that which he had preached to them, he did not hesitate to pronounce them accursed[p]. Nor had he any respect of persons. When preaching before kings, he spake so plainly as to make them tremble on their throne[q]: and when addressing those who professed godliness, he warned them frequently with tears, that carnal and worldly-minded Christians, whatever they might profess, were "enemies of the cross of Christ; and that their end would be destruction[r]."]

2. He "taught every man in all wisdom"—

[Being himself instructed beyond any of the sons of men, he laboured to impart what he had so freely received, and to make known to his hearers "the whole counsel of God." Yet in this he exercised discretion. He administered milk to babes, and strong meat to those only who were able to digest it[s]. As, on the one hand,

[g] Eph. iii. 17. [h] Gal. ii. 20. [i] Col. iii. 4.
[k] 2 Cor. iii. 5. [l] 2 Cor. xiii. 5. [m] Rom. viii. 9.
[n] 2 Cor. v. 11. [o] Heb. ii. 3. & 1 Cor. xvi. 22.
[p] Gal. i. 8, 9. [q] Acts xxiv. 25. [r] Phil. iii. 18, 19.
[s] 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. Heb. v. 13, 14.

hand, he accommodated himself to the infirmities of the weak, so, on the other hand, he "withheld nothing that could be profitable" to the strong[t]. As far as he could with a good conscience, "he became all things to all men, that by all means he might save some[u]."

Hence it appears with how much justice he called himself "a wise master-builder[x]:" indeed the whole of his ministrations prove him to have been "a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth[y]."]

The reason of his thus accommodating himself to the state of his hearers, will be seen by considering,

III. The *scope* or end at which he continually aimed—

The Apostle considered himself to be nearly in the situation of Abraham's servant, who was sent out to procure a wife for Isaac[z]: and, like him, he laboured to accomplish his mission in the best and most successful manner[a]. He wished to present all, whether Jews or Gentiles, "perfect in Christ Jesus:"

1. Perfect in his righteousness—

[All who believe in Christ are freely justified from all their sins[b]. They are clothed in the unspotted robe of Christ's righteousness, and are "presented faultless before the presence of the Father's glory[c]." Whatever iniquities may have been committed by them in their former life, they are all "blotted out as a morning cloud, and cast into the depths of the sea." From the moment that they believe in Jesus, they are perfectly reconciled to God; they are "accepted in the Beloved[d]," and are "complete in him[e]."]

2. Perfect through his grace—

[This was the end at which our blessed Lord aimed in dying for sinners[f]: and the very same was the Apostle's end in preaching to them. He would not have his converts to continue in a low state of holiness, but to attain the fullest conformity to the Divine image: he would have them to "be holy, even as He which had called them was holy[g]." This is the more usual acceptation of the term "perfect" in the Sacred Volume: it means that growth which Christians in general may be expected to attain: it imports maturity, in opposition to infantine weakness. And so anxious was the Apostle to bring his converts to this state, that he continued

[t] Acts xx. 20. [u] 1 Cor. ix. 19—22. [x] 1 Cor. iii. 10.
[y] 2 Tim. ii. 15. [z] Gen. xxiv. 4. [a] 2 Cor. xi. 2.
[b] Acts xiii. 39. [c] Jude 24. [d] Eph. i. 6.
[e] Col. ii. 10. & Rev. iii. 18. middle clause. [f] ver. 22.
[g] 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

tinued "travailing, as it were, in birth with them," till it was fully accomplished: and this was the true reason of his so often "changing his voice" towards them[h] in a way of consolation or reproof.]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. What ministry that is which alone is likely to prove successful—

[St. Paul is doubtless the best model for a Christian Minister: consequently, *he* is most likely to labour with effect, who follows him in the *subject*, the *manner*, and the *scope* of his ministrations. Let those therefore who have this holy office committed to them, be followers of him. Let them know nothing but Christ, and him crucified; let them warn or comfort men with all faithfulness; let them not relax their labours as long as they can have access to one who is not yet presented perfect in Christ Jesus; and let them regard the turning of many unto righteousness as the best and richest reward of all their labours.]

2. In what light a faithful Ministry should be regarded—

[The preaching of Christ is generally called enthusiasm: the warning of men respecting their guilt is deemed harshness: the labouring to instruct men is ascribed to an officious impertinence, or ostentatious vanity, or perhaps designing hypocrisy. A solicitude to bring men to a state of spiritual perfection is reckoned among the most unpardonable of crimes; insomuch that the drunkard, the whoremonger, and adulterer, shall meet with more favour from the world at large, than a faithful, diligent, conscientious Minister. But if we revere the person and ministry of Paul, we ought also to honour those who resemble him; and to concur with them to the uttermost, by a submission to their rebukes, a following of their instructions, and an entire devoting of ourselves to the service and enjoyment of God. We should have the same end in hearing which they have in preaching to us: we should not be satisfied with any low attainment, but desire and labour to be "perfect in Christ Jesus."]

[h] Gal. iv. 19, 20.

MLI.

THE FULNESS THAT IS IN CHRIST.

Col. ii. 3. *In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

"WISDOM," we are told, "is the principal thing; and therefore we should get wisdom." In all civilized countries,

countries, wisdom has been held in the highest repute: and institutions have been set on foot for the cultivation of it. How highly it was esteemed amongst our ancestors, we may judge from the provision which they made for the education of youth in all succeeding ages. Not that the Establishments in this seat of learning were intended merely to reward those who distinguished themselves by early attainments: they were designed to give them also an opportunity of bestowing an undivided attention to literature and science throughout the remainder of their days: and if they be not improved for this end, the fault is not in the institutions themselves, but in those who have been admitted into them. We can have seen but little of the world, if we have not noticed the superiority which a cultivated mind possesses over one that is rude and uninstructed. And though it must be granted, that human learning will not change and sanctify the heart, yet we assert, that it will give a very great advantage for the understanding and explaining of the Holy Scriptures.

We say not that God *could* not, or *did* not, make use of weak and unlettered men for the diffusion of his Gospel: but, as he selected Moses, a man "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," for the instruction and government of the Jewish Church, so he selected Paul, who had "been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel," to be his Messenger of grace to the Gentile world: and, if he was pleased so to adapt the instrument to the work in that age of miracles, much more is such a qualification desirable for his chosen servants, now that miracles have ceased. We must not however forget, that the Scriptures are the fountain of true wisdom. We should ever bear in mind, that the Heathen Sages, though wiser than their contemporaries, were deplorably ignorant in comparison of those who live under the Christian dispensation: and even the light which some of the most learned amongst them possessed, was most probably obtained, either immediately or remotely, from the Inspired Volume. There, and there alone, is true wisdom to be found; and therein are contained "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

To

To open and unfold these to you, is an employment worthy of the occasion on which we are assembled*.

St. Paul in my text is expressing his ardent desire in behalf of the Christians at Colosse, whom he had never seen, that they might be fully instructed in the great mystery of the Gospel of Christ, "in *whom*, he observes, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;" but, in the margin, the word mystery is considered as the antecedent; and the translation is, "*wherein;*" i. e. "*in which mystery* are contained all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge:" and this we consider as the better rendering, though the sense will amount to nearly the same, either way.

In illustration of these words, we shall,

I. Open to you these treasures of wisdom and knowledge—

II. Commend them to your diligent pursuit—

I. We are to open to you these treasures of wisdom and knowledge—

But "who is sufficient for such" an undertaking? Who can enter on such a task, without a fear, not only that he shall betray his own ignorance, and disappoint your expectations, but that he may even expose the Gospel itself to contempt? Indeed, if I were capable of doing justice to my subject, such is the impatience of modern auditories, that I could not have time to do more than merely open to you the casket, and give you a superficial view of its contents: but feeling how incompetent I am to unfold all the hidden mysteries of the Gospel, I must intreat you to make up for my deficiencies by your candour; and to be contented with treasuring up for your benefit what you do hear, when you cannot be gratified with all that you would wish to hear.

There are three points to which I will call your attention; and which may give you some little idea, that the subject, however unworthily handled by me, is at least deserving

* It was a COMMEMORATION, Sermon in King's College Chapel, Cambridge.

deserving of the deepest investigation. The points I refer to are at all events such as the most enlightened Heathens had no idea of; namely, *The real state of man —The eternal counsels of God concerning him*—and *the stupendous effects produced by those counsels.* Let these things be for a while considered by us.

The real state of man was altogether unknown to the Heathen world. That he was a weak, guilty, and polluted creature, they knew; but how weak, how guilty, how polluted, they had no conception; much less did they know how he was brought into such a state. It is from the Inspired Volume alone that we learn the perfection of his original nature, and the loss of that perfection through the fall of his first parent. From thence alone do we learn that obvious truth, that we "cannot bring a clean thing out of an unclean." Behold then, at the very outset, what a stupendous mystery is here! that we died in Adam! that "those who have never sinned after the similitude of his transgression," are yet partakers both of his guilt and corruption! that we are "born in iniquity, and conceived in sin," and are "by nature children of wrath!"

To this I beg your particular attention, because it is the very foundation of all spiritual knowledge; it is the very threshold, by stumbling at which, multitudes are kept from ever entering into the deep recesses of the Gospel. You cannot but know, that men in general, and even learned Divines, endeavour to soften down the Scripture declarations of man's guilt and misery: some deny that we are fallen at all; and assert that we come into the world as pure as Adam did from his Creator's hands. Others allow that we are fallen, but deny that we are involved in the guilt of our first parents, or that the corruption which we inherit from them is any thing more than what we have an innate power to subdue. They think that the descriptions given of us in the Inspired Volume are not to be taken in a literal sense; and that to say that we are "*dead* in trespasses and sins," is only a metaphor, importing that we are not quite so much alive to God and holiness as we ought to be.

And now mark how entirely such sentiments obstruct the

the way to true wisdom and knowledge: man being in so good a state, there was no occasion for the counsels of the Most High to suggest a method of deliverance from it: a way of deliverance was obvious enough: there was no necessity for God himself to become incarnate, and to expiate the sins of men by his own blood; (man might be saved without any such sacrifice:) there was no need that the third person in the ever-blessed Trinity should undertake to dwell in the hearts of men, to enlighten their minds, to draw them unto Christ, to renew their nature, and to make them meet for heaven; (man of himself, by the aid of his own reason and resolution, was sufficient for these things:) the obligations conferred upon us by this work of redemption are not such as to call for all the powers of our souls to be consecrated to God in the way of holy obedience; (such a life is needless, enthusiastic, and absurd:) in a word, there is no great cause for alarm to any of us; for we are all in the way to heaven; and when we get there, shall have no great wonders to celebrate, but only to thank God for that which he could not justly or consistently have withheld. Yes, Brethren, *this* it is which obstructs the entrance of light into the souls of men: *this* it is which makes every one suppose that he understands the Gospel well enough: *this* it is that leads men to deride all idea of mystery, and to reduce the Gospel to a system of Heathen ethics. *This view of our state by nature supersedes all occasion for the Gospel;* every part of which supposes man to be a *guilty, polluted, helpless* creature; so *guilty*, that he deserves the everlasting wrath of God; so *polluted*, that he must be made an entire new creature before he can have any enjoyment of God, either now or in the eternal world[b]; and so weak, that he cannot of himself either do a good act, or think a good thought[c]: and I do not hesitate to affirm, that the very first step towards true wisdom and knowledge is, to renounce all idea of our being "rich and increased in goods, and in need of nothing;" and to confess, from our inmost souls, that we are "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

Next,

[b] John iii. 3 [c] John xv. 5. 2 Cor. iii. 5. Phil. ii. 13.

Next, let us contemplate *the counsels of the Most High respecting man*. From all eternity, God foresaw the state to which the human race would be reduced, and concerted with his only dear Son how to effect their recovery. The Father proposed to his Son to become our Surety and Substitute; to assume our nature; to bear our sins; to expiate our guilt; to fulfil the law which we had broken, and to satisfy the justice which we had offended; and thus to restore us to happiness, without dishonouring God as the Moral Governor of the universe. The Son accepts the proposal, and undertakes to accomplish the redemption of a ruined world[d]: and the Holy Spirit also undertakes to impart to the souls of the redeemed all that the Lord Jesus should purchase for them[e]. To these counsels the Apostle also constantly refers, as the true source of our redemption: "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world, unto our glory[f]:" and he declares that the manifestation of them to the world under the Christian dispensation was eminently committed to him, and was to be a source of knowledge, not to men only, but to the angels themselves: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the *unsearchable riches* of Christ; and to make all men see, what is the fellowship of this mystery, which *from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God*, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, *according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*[g]."

Behold then here what treasures of wisdom and knowledge are unfolded to us! We see the veil torn away from

[d] Isai. xlix. 6. & liii. 4, 5, 10, 11.

[e] See the account given us of this in the 40th Psalm (ver. 6—8). "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart."

[f] 1 Cor. ii. 7. [g] Eph. iii. 8—11. See also Col. i. 26, 27.

from before our eyes, and the Sacred Three sitting, as it were, in council, to provide for man's recovery, myriads of ages before his fall: we behold the Father proposing to lay our iniquities on his only-begotten Son; his Son accepting the office of our Substitute; and the Holy Spirit engaging to render those mysterious plans effectual for the salvation of man! Can we see nothing wonderful in all this? Does not this "love surpass all knowledge," and all conception? Is there not in it "a length, and breadth, and depth, and height" that can never be explored? Yes: and hence St. Paul speaks of "riches of glory" as contained in this mystery[h]; and, in reference even to a subordinate part of it only, exclaims, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out[i]!"

Let us now pass on to *the effects of these counsels*, and see whether they also do not unfold the most stupendous mysteries.

From these counsels results all *the work of Christ*. He in due time left the bosom of his Father, took our nature, was born of a pure virgin, fulfilled the law, offered himself a sacrifice for sin, rose from the dead, and ascended up to heaven to carry on and perfect the work which he began on earth. Think of all this as *necessary* for our salvation: think of it as *concerted from eternity*, and executed in time, and *at this very moment accomplishing* by means of his continual intercession at the right hand of God: Is there nothing wonderful in all this?

From these counsels also results *the salvation of man*. Not a human Being to whom the Gospel comes is ever saved, but by virtue of this work which Christ wrought out for him: and by means of this the vilest of the human race are saved. Those who seek an interest in this Saviour are accepted of him, even though they may have committed sins of a scarlet or crimson dye: but they "who, going about to establish their own righteousness, will not submit to the righteousness of God," are rejected; and the very Saviour who would have been a sanctuary

[h] Col. i. 27. [i] Rom. xi. 33.

a sanctuary to them, becomes a rock of offence, over which they fall to their eternal ruin. Here is a plain way of salvation for all. In vain do men dispute about the efficacy of their own good works to save them: here is a door; and they who will enter in by it are saved; and those who obstinately stand without, perish. The very builders of the ark themselves perished, because they did not enter into it: and so will all who do not flee for refuge to this hope that is set before them. Is this wisdom, or this knowledge of small value?

Further, from these counsels results *the glory of God himself.* It is in this way alone that God is, or can be glorified, by any Child of man. If man were saved in any other way, every one of the Divine perfections would be dishonoured. What evidence would there be that God is *holy*, if he suffered his laws to be violated with impunity? What would become of all the rights of *justice*, if no sacrifice were offered for sin? How could the *truth* of God be preserved, if his threatenings were not executed, either against the sinner himself, or against one who should be substituted in his place? Men speak of God's mercy, as if that was the only attribute to be displayed, and as if it was of no consequence whether his other attributes were honoured or not: but God will not suffer one of his attributes to be exalted at the expense of all the rest: and therefore has he opened for us a way of salvation whereby all might be displayed and all be glorified. Not only is mercy now exalted, but justice too; and *that*, not only in the condemnation, but in the salvation also of sinful man: nor is it a whit less glorified in the salvation of a penitent Believer, than it is in the condemnation of the impenitent, and unbelieving. Is here then no mystery? are here no treasures of wisdom and knowledge? Verily the Angels themselves are made wiser by the revelation of them to the Church; and they are justly represented as "desiring daily to look into them," in order that their admiration of God may be augmented, and their felicity increased.

We have been constrained to speak only summarily on these points; but enough has been said to shew, that

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in this subject there are treasures which will amply repay the most laborious investigation.

We proceed, therefore,

II. To commend these treasures to your most diligent pursuit.

Much as we revere human knowledge, we must declare, that, in comparison of that which we have been considering, the wisdom of philosophers is of no account: for this knowledge is at once the *most sublime*, the *most certain*, the *most attainable*, the *most useful*.

What is there so *sublime* as this? We grant that many human sciences, and astronomy in particular, are very sublime; and appear to be out of the reach of mortal man: but it is well known that philosophy, in many of its branches, was carried to as high, if not a much higher pitch among the unenlightened Heathen, than amongst ourselves. But who amongst the Heathen could ever find out God? Who could ever dive into his counsels? Who could account for the actual state of things as they existed in the world? Who could tell how a sinful man might be accepted of his God? Truly, "the world by wisdom knew not God:" this knowledge was "too wonderful and excellent" for unassisted reason to explore: nor can we, even with the Bible in our hands, attain it, unless God by his Spirit open the eyes of our understanding, and shine into our hearts to give it us. We are expressly told, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for us;" and the things there spoken of are those which are revealed to us in the Gospel. It is not of heaven that the Apostle speaks, but of the Gospel, and the mysteries contained in it. These are the things which are called in Scripture τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Θεοῦ, "the wonderful works of God[k]." And they are "the things of the Spirit, which the natural man cannot receive, nor even know, because they are spiritually discerned." Well therefore may we covet knowledge which was "hid in God from the foundation of the world," which the wisest philosophers could never attain, which even the learned among

[k] Acts ii. 11.

among ourselves cannot possess, unless God himself be their teacher, and "open their understandings to understand it."

In point of *certainty*, there is nothing that can be compared with it. There are indeed in it many things which we cannot comprehend: but there is much known, and known on the authority of God himself. Most other knowledge is involved in doubt and obscurity; insomuch that hypotheses which have been established for ages, have yet been overthrown by the penetration of a Copernicus or a Newton: but the truth of God is unchangeable; and whether viewed in the promise to Adam, or in subsequent prophecies, or in the types and shadows of the Law, or in the fuller revelation of the Gospel, is ever the same; nor can all the reasonings of men or devils invalidate so much as one single point. Indeed, though received on the credit of the Inspired Writers, it so commends itself to the Believer, as to approve to him its Divine origin, as soon as ever it is received into his heart: he there finds a counterpart of every truth he has received, and "hath the witness in himself" that it is indeed from God. Now one great discouragement in the pursuit of human knowledge is, that after having laboured for many years, we know not but that we may, after all, be found wrong, in things which we deemed of considerable moment. But here, we never need to fear a disappointment: God's word, like himself, abideth for ever; nor shall one jot or tittle of it ever fail.

Nor is there any other so *attainable*. Thousands have not ability to investigate the depths of human science: if they should bestow ever so much labour, for ever so long a time, it would be in vain. But not so the knowledge of the Gospel: for though it is so deep, that no man by the efforts of unassisted reason can enter into it, yet it is so easy of acquisition, that "he who runs, may read and understand it." If God "open our eyes, we shall see wondrous things out of his law:" if he shine into our hearts, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shall be seen by us. The qualification for this knowledge consists, not so much in the head, as in the heart: "God opened the *heart* of Lydia to attend to the things

that were spoken by Paul." Here then every one is encouraged to pursue it: for "none teacheth like God:" he can "ordain strength in the mouth of babes and sucklings." I grant indeed that it is a "hidden knowledge; it is "a treasure hid" in a field. But it is revealed *to* us in the word, and shall be revealed *in* us by the Spirit, if we desire to be taught of him. The promise is, "All thy children shall be taught of God:" and, if only we obtain his teaching, we shall "be guided into all truth;" nor shall "a way-faring man, though a fool, be left to err therein."

Lastly, What can be compared with it in point of *utility?* We deny not but that knowledge of various kinds is replete with benefit to man: but *that* benefit is bounded by this world, and the present state of things. Not so the knowledge of which we are speaking: that extends to the eternal world: in the knowledge of God and of Christ are all our hopes centered. By this we are *justified:* as it is said, "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many." By it also we are *sanctified:* as it is said, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." By it also we shall be *exalted to glory;* for it is said, "This is life eternal that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." What is there then that can be compared with this? Will earthly knowledge save you? If you could travel the whole round of science, and grasp in your mind all that ever was comprehended by human intellect, would it pacify a guilty conscience? Would it take away the sting of death? Would it enable you to look forward with comfort to the eternal world? Would it prepare you to stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, and to give up your account with joy? No: nothing can do this but the knowledge of God as reconciled to us in the Son of his love: this is the sole property of the Gospel, even of that Gospel which is so neglected and despised. If then you would view these things aright, you must study the Gospel, and "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord."

Must we then lay aside our earthly knowledge? you will ask. No: but you must get it sanctified by the Spirit

Spirit of God. The spoils of the Midianites were consecrated to the Lord: but before they were suffered to be brought into his tabernacle, "every thing that would abide the fire, must pass through the fire; and whatsoever would not abide the fire, must be made to go through the water:" for then only could they be an acceptable offering to him, when they were cleansed and purified from their corruption[a]. Thus also must your learning be sanctified: it must not be set in competition with the word of God, but be made subservient to it. Beware then lest it blind your eyes, and fill you with a conceit that you do not need to be taught of God: for what the Apostle says is alike applicable to the philosopher and the peasant, "If any man will be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise." We must have the docility of "little children, if we would enter into the kingdom of heaven;" and if we will not humble ourselves in that manner, God has told us, that "he will take the wise in their own craftiness." In subserviency to the Gospel, your learning will be an invaluable blessing: but in opposition to it, it will prove a curse; for God will "confound the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

Are we then desirous of attaining these heavenly treasures? Let us seek after them in the holy Scriptures: and whilst we seek for knowledge as silver, and "search for it as for hid treasures, let us cry to God for it, and lift up our voice to him; since it is the Lord that giveth wisdom, and out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding[b]." Let us beg of God to "give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; that the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead[c]." In this way we may hope to "acquaint ourselves with God," and to attain the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."

[a] Numb. xxxi. 23, 54. [b] Prov. ii. 1—6. [c] Eph. i. 16—20.

standing." Then we may hope also to "shine as lights in a dark world," and "be as cities set upon an hill." Or, if our sphere be circumscribed within narrower limits, we shall at least have this benefit, that we are "made wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus."

MLII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S COMPLETENESS IN CHRIST.

Col. ii. 10—12. *Ye are complete in him, which is the Head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.*

MAN is prone to corrupt whatever proceeds from God. He himself came pure out of his Maker's hands: but he soon corrupted his way; as it is said; "God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions[a]." As man has effaced the law originally written upon his heart, so has he, by imaginations of his own, obscured the revelation which God has given to the world. The Mosaic code was perverted by the Jews: the Christian code has been no less perverted by those who have called themselves Christians. Even in the Apostolic age, and whilst the Apostles were yet in the full exercise of their Ministry, persons arose to mutilate and destroy the faith of Christ. The very professors of Christianity, instead of receiving implicitly the truth as it was revealed, introduced into it their own corrupt notions; the Heathen converts retaining their predilection for their former idolatry; and Jewish converts striving to encumber it with their former superstitions. It is against such persons that St. Paul is cautioning the Colossian Church: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ[b]. The Heathen philosophers

[a] Eccl. vii. 29. [b] ver. 8.

phers having multiplied their deities, and assigned to them a variety of ranks and offices, those who had been converted from amongst them still felt inclined to look to subordinate deities as their Mediators and protectors: whilst others from among the Jews, who had, or pretended to have, a great veneration for Moses, could not part with the traditions which they had received from their fathers, and which they supposed to be highly conducive to their spiritual benefit. But St. Paul tells both the one and the other, that they needed no help from the creature, since "in Christ dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead;" and no created power could do any thing for them, any farther than he was expressly commissioned by Christ to do it: in a word, that "they were complete in Christ;" and all attempts to add any thing to him, would retard, rather than advance, their conformity to his will, and would ultimately deprive them of all the benefits which they were thus erroneously labouring to secure.

This being the scope of the whole passage, we will draw your attention to the two things mentioned in our text; namely,

I. The Christian's completeness in Christ—

In Christ we have all that we can possibly need or desire—

[As God, he has "all the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him bodily;" and consequently is an almighty and all-sufficient Saviour. But as man also, he has, by virtue of his Mediatorial office, a fulness committed to him for the supply of his believing people; according as it is said, "It hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell[c]." In our corporeal frame there is, if I may so say, a fulness imparted to the head for the use of all the members, *that* being the chief depository of all the senses: so there is in Christ, for the use of all his members: all that we need is treasured up in him: and he of God is made unto us "wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption[d]" ———]

Nor can the creature add any thing to us—

[What, I would ask, can "Philosophy, with all its vain deceits," add to us? Can it suggest one single truth which is not contained in the holy Scriptures, or give us one atom of spiritual

[c] Col. i. 19. [d] 1 Cor. i. 30.

ritual discernment? ——— Can it devise any other way for a sinner's justification before God, besides that which the Scripture reveals, through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ? ——— Can it add any thing to the operations of the Holy Spirit for the transformation of our souls into the Divine image? ——— Can it further, in any one respect, the everlasting redemption of our souls, so that we shall say, This is the work of Philosophy, and not of Christ? ——— If the *maxims* of philosophy cannot effect any thing, can its *Deities?* Can they help us, either by their personal efficiency, or by their mediation with any other? I ask further, Can Jewish rites, whether those that have been devised by man, or those which were originally ordained of God, add to us in any of these respects? No: we confidently say, that the Christian is "complete in Christ:" he has in Christ all that he can stand in need of, and to confide in any other is to rob him of his glory, and fatally to deceive our own souls.]

But besides the Christian's completeness in Christ, we are called to notice,

II. His conformity to Christ—

That Christ is *an example* to us, is what every Christian well knows. But there is a distinction which is not generally adverted to, which yet it is of importance to remark; namely, that as he is an *example* to us in his *life*, so is he also, if we may so express it, an *exemplar* or *pattern* to us in his *work*. We will explain our meaning.

Christ having undertaken to redeem our souls, submitted to all that was necessary for that end: he *was circumcised*, as being made under the law for us: he *died* under the curse of that law; and after having been *buried* in the grave, he *rose again* for our justification before God. Now all this which was done *in him corporeally*, is to be done *in us spiritually*: the one was intended to be *a pattern* of the other. This is very minutely set forth by the apostle Paul, who tells us that the power exercised towards us who believe, exactly accords with that which was exercised towards our Lord Jesus Christ in all the fore-mentioned particulars: his quickening from the dead, his rising from the grave, his ascension to heaven, and his session at the right hand of God far above all the principalities and powers

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of heaven or hell, have all a counterpart in us, wrought by the same divine Agent [e].

Consider distinctly wherein this conformity consists—

[Was he circumcised? We have the true circumcision of the heart; that "which is made without hands, and which consists in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh:" and this we have by virtue of our own union with Christ, *in whom* we have experienced this *mystically*, and *through whom* we derive it *spiritually*. Was he *buried?* We also, in our baptism, were, as it were, buried with him; and coming up also from the water, (for here immersion seems to be referred to, as sprinkling evidently is in other places, the mode being not determinate to either, but left optional according to circumstances,) we are risen with him to a new and heavenly life. That this is the true import of the passage, is beyond all doubt; as any one will see by comparing what the same writer has stated in his Epistle to the Romans [f]——Here, I say, the parallel between what was *corporeally* wrought *in Christ*, and *spiritually* to be wrought *in his members*, is clear and manifest: we, "by faith in that power which raised him from the dead," experience a similar resurrection to newness of life———]

In reference to this then, as well as to the former, we ask,

What can philosophy add to us?

[Has philosophy any principles whereby we can be stimulated more entirely to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, than we are led by the Gospel of Christ; or can it impart to us any strength beyond that which we derive from Christ? Did it ever operate thus in any instance from the foundation of the world? No: it never did, nor ever can. We further ask, Is there any such virtue in Judaizing principles, that we should have recourse to any of them for aid? No: we are expressly told, that by seeking aid from philosophical conceits or Jewish superstitions we shall not only not add to our safety, but shall actually be "beguiled and robbed of our ultimate reward [g]." It is to Christ alone that we must look, and from Christ we must receive all that is necessary for the carrying on and perfecting of our everlasting salvation.]

To IMPROVE this subject, we say to all,

1. Be thankful to God that your lot is cast where the Gospel is plainly and faithfully dispensed—

[The corruptions which began in the Apostolic age have since been

[e] Compare attentively Eph. i. 19—22. & ii. 4—6.
[f] Rom. vi. 3—11. [g] ver. 18.

been carried to such an extent as altogether to subvert the Gospel of Christ. If I be asked before God, What Popery is? I am constrained to answer, that, Whatever it be *in theory*, it is *in practice* little better than a compound of Pagan idolatry and Jewish superstition. For want of seeing it before our eyes, we are apt to conceive of it as differing but little from the religion we profess: but it is in all its masses, penances, indulgences, such a system of delusion and impiety as makes one's very blood run cold. It is inconceivable how such a system of tyranny and imposture should have ever gained footing in the world. Little do the Protestants of the present day reflect on the obligations which they owe to their forefathers, and of the responsibility attaching to them for the advantages they enjoy. But could your eyes see in what darkness and bondage those who are of the Roman-Catholic persuasion are held, you would never cease to bless God, that you have been born in a Protestant land, and been brought up members of a Church that is alike free from the errors of fanaticism, and the bonds of superstition. I know indeed that even in our Protestant Church there is still, in some places, as there was even in the Apostolic age, a leaven of these deadly evils: but we speak to those who are instructed to seek a completeness in Christ and a conformity to Christ, as the unalienable privilege of every true Believer.]

2. Beware of that false humility which would lead you to intrench upon the sufficiency of Christ—

[It was a false humility that led those in the Apostolic age to seek other Mediators or protectors besides Christ, and other means of obtaining his blessings than by faith alone. But whilst they assumed this "voluntary humility," they in reality were "vainly puffed up with a fleshly mind[h]." So it is with those in the present day, who look for something to recommend them to Christ, whilst they should be receiving all out of his fulness as a free unmerited gift. Their principle is precisely that of which the Apostle complained in the Colossian Church. They think it would be presumption in them to go directly to Christ, and to expect to be admitted by him with such a load of guilt and corruption as they feel: and therefore they hope to make themselves better before they go, that so they may find a readier acceptance with him. But this is to dishonour Christ, and to take from him both the sovereignty and the riches of his grace. We must never forget the terms on which alone we are to obtain the blessings of his salvation: we are to buy them, it is true; but we are to "buy them all without money and without price"———]

3. Live simply by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—

[It is "through faith in the Divine power" that all our completeness

[h] ver. 18.

completeness in Christ, or conformity to Christ, is to be obtained: and to exercise that faith, we are encouraged by the recollection of what that power has effected "in raising Christ from the dead[1]." Take a view then of the Lord Jesus after his crucifixion: see him dead, and buried, and guarded by a host of enemies who were determined in a few hours to prove him an impostor. Is he beyond the reach of Divine power? No: at the appointed moment he rises, and ascends to heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God, far above all the principalities and powers of earth and hell. Are you then in a more desperate state than he? or is not the power of God alike able to effect this change for you? Yea, is it not as much pledged for you as it was for him? Fear not then, "nor stagger at the promises of God through unbelief;" but, as Abraham before you was, "be strong in faith, giving glory to God."]

[1] The text.

MLIII.

TRIUMPHS OF THE CROSS.

Col. ii. 13—15. *And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross: and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*

THERE is one great mystery spoken of throughout the Scriptures, connected indeed with innumerable other truths, but itself the centre and substance of them all: this mystery is Christ crucified. St. Paul in particular insists upon it in all his Epistles: he declares that it was the one only thing which he deemed necessary for him to preach, or for his people to be acquainted with. He takes every occasion of magnifying its importance, and of urging his converts to maintain the strictest regard to it. This appears remarkably in the preceding context[a]; wherein not only the mystery itself is stated, but the rich benefits arising from it are largely recited. Having in general terms said, "We are complete in Christ," he enters more minutely into the subject, and declares that we have communion with him in

[a] See Chap. i. 27, 28. & ii. 1—4, 6, 7.

in the whole of his humiliation and exaltation, being "circumcised in him, and buried with him, and risen with him," and, in short, partakers of all his victories and triumphs.

In the text, three benefits are enumerated as conferred by him upon his believing people, and which we propose for our present consideration. If we were to adhere strictly to the order of time in which these benefits were procured for us and imparted to us, we must take the latter clauses of the text first: but, as this is not necessary, we shall rather notice them as they stand; and observe,

I. He has "quickened us when dead"—

The state of the Gentile world fitly represents the state of every unregenerate man—

[We are dead before God, and doomed to everlasting death, on account of our sins[b] ——— We are also under the habitual influence of the most corrupt desires, the mortifying of which was signified by the rite of circumcision, and the indulgence of which characterizes those who are uncircumcised in heart[c] ——— We have no spiritual life whatever, nor are we even conscious of our own guilt and corruption; so justly may we be said to be altogether "*dead* in our sins."]

But God has quickened us with, and by, his Son—

[There is *a fœderal relation* subsisting between Christ and his people; so that when he was circumcised, they were circumcised; when he died, they died; when he rose, they rose. In all that he did and suffered, he was their Representative, and they had communion with him as members with their head.

But besides this, they have *a vital union* with him, so as actually to receive life and vigour from him, whereby they rise to newness of life[d] ——— In this restoration to life they are conformed to his likeness; they come forth from the grave of sin and corruption, and soar in their affections to the highest heavens, where from thenceforth their conversation is, and where they shall have their everlasting abode.]

In addition to this benefit,

II. He has cancelled our obligation to punishment—

This he has done in reference to,

1. Past sins—

[The trespasses which we commit in our unregenerate state are

[b] Gal. iii. 10. [c] Tit. iii. 3. Eph. ii. 3. [d] Gal. ii. 20.

are as numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore: yet, on our believing in Christ, they are all forgiven. Whether they have been more or less heinous, they are all pardoned. This is not spoken of as a blessing that shall be enjoyed in the eternal world, but as actually possessed at this time. God has cast our sins behind him into the very depths of the sea[e]."

2. Present infirmities—

[We must not be understood to say that Believers have obtained a licence to commit sin with impunity; for nothing can be more contrary to truth: *this* would make "Christ himself a Minister of sin." But our meaning is this: the Moral Law denounces a curse against every one that transgresses it even in the smallest point. The Ceremonial Law illustrates and confirms those penal sanctions. The very sacrifices which were the appointed means of expiating sin, declared that the offerer deserved to die, and that he could not be saved but by the sufferings and death of an innocent victim. From hence it appears, that "the hand-writing of ordinances," which, in its external obligation, related only to the Jews, did, in its spiritual and more enlarged sense, declare the state of all mankind, whether Jews or Gentiles: and in this view it was equally "against *us*, and contrary to *us*."

Now this hand-writing Christ has "blotted out," and, by "nailing it to his cross," has "taken it out of the way." There were different ways of cancelling a bond: sometimes it was blotted out; and sometimes it was pierced with a nail, and rendered thereby of no effect. Both these ways, if we may so speak, has Christ adopted, that we might have the fullest security that we shall never be dealt with according to the rigour of the Law; and that the debt we owe on account of our unallowed infirmities shall never be required at our hands.]

A further obligation he has conferred upon us, in that

III. He has defeated all our spiritual enemies—

Satan and all his hosts are combined against us—

[They have usurped a power over us, and governed us with most despotic sway[f]———]

But Christ has completely triumphed over them upon his cross—

[As a conqueror, he invaded the empire of Satan, and rescued millions of the human race from his dominion. He "spoiled the principalities and powers" of hell, and seized as his prey the souls of which they had so long held an undisturbed possession[g]. It was upon his cross that he effected this: for there

[e] Mic. vii. 19. [f] Eph. ii. 2. & 2 Tim. ii. 26.
[g] Luke xi. 22. Isai. liii. 12.

there it was that he satisfied divine justice; there it was he fulfilled and cancelled the obligations of the law; there it was that he paid the price of our salvation. "He redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us[h]." His triumph was then complete. Like a victorious General leading in chains the distinguished personages whom the chance of war had put into his hands, our blessed Lord exhibited, as it were, to the view of God, of angels, and of his believing people, the vanquished powers of darkness: "he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them upon his cross." He did not indeed, like earthly conquerors, exult in victories gained by the sword of others, and at the expense of their blood: his triumphs were gained by no sword but his, and with the loss of no blood but his: "His own arm brought salvation; and he trod the wine-press of God's wrath alone[i]."]

INFER,

1. What a wonderful sight is the cross of Christ!

[The eye of sense can behold nothing in it but an instrument of punishment, and a person suffering upon it as a malefactor. But what will the eye of faith behold? It will discern, not a sufferer, but a conqueror; not one raised on an accursed tree, but exalted on a triumphant car; not one crowned with thorns, but wearing a wreath of victory: not one nailed and bleeding, but one blotting out with blood, and cancelling with nails, the bonds that were against his chosen people: not one himself a spectacle, but exhibiting to view his vanquished enemies: not the despised Nazarene, but "the Lord of glory." Strange as it may sound, we affirm, that it was not Jesus, but the Prince of this world that was then judged[k], cast out[l], destroyed[m]: for it was *then* that Jesus "bruised the serpent's head[n]:" "by death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who till that hour had been all their life-time subject to bondage[o]." Prostrate before him lay the principalities and powers of hell. Yes, Satan, it was thy power that was then broken, thy shame that was then exposed, thy doom that was then irrevocably sealed. Thou art now an object of our contempt; and the weakest amongst us will set his feet upon thy neck, and tremble at thee no more[oo]. "Thou art fallen, O Lucifer, son of the morning;" "thou art fallen from heaven like lightning;" and lower still shalt thou fall; for we thy once infatuated vassals can triumph over thee now; and thou shalt "ere long be bruised under our feet[p]."

Beloved Brethren, "turn aside and see this great sight,"—your triumphing

[h] Gal. iii. 13. [i] Isai. lxiii. 3, 5. [k] John xvi. 11.
[l] John xii. 31. [m] Heb. ii. 14. [n] Gen. iii. 15.
[o] See Note [m], & Ps. lxviii. 18. [oo] Josh. x. 24.
[p] Rom. xvi. 20.

triumphing Lord, and your despoiled enemies! Nor cease to contemplate it, till you are filled with admiration, and gratitude, and joy.]

2. What folly is it to suffer ourselves to be diverted from it!

[This is the particular improvement which the Apostle himself makes of the passage. He had guarded the Colossians against the sceptical pride of philosophers[pp]; and he proceeds to guard them against the self-justifying pride of Judaïzing teachers[q]. To the one of these the cross of Christ was a stumbling-block, and to the other foolishness; but to those who viewed it aright, it was the power of God and the wisdom of God[r]. Thus at this time we are particularly in danger of being led away from the simplicity of the Gospel, either by the conceits of philosophy, falsely so called, or by the observance of a formal round of duties. But let nothing draw your attention from the cross of Christ. It is *by that only* that you can be quickened: *by that only* you can be forgiven: *by that only* you can obtain deliverance from the penal sanction of the law, or victory over the enemies of your salvation. When you can find another object, or other principles, that can effect these things, then we consent that you shall disregard the cross of Christ. But till then, determine to know nothing[s], trust in nothing[t], glory in nothing[u], but Christ, and him crucified.]

[pp] ver. 8. [q] ver. 16. [r] 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.
[s] 1 Cor. ii. 2. [t] Phil. iii. 9. [u] Gal. vi. 14.

MLIV.

THE EXALTED STATE OF A CHRISTIAN.

Col. iii. 3, 4. *Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*

INNUMERABLE are the advantages which Revelation gives us over the Heathen Philosophers: for, whilst it discovers to us a much sublimer rule of conduct than they were able to devise, it affords motives sufficient to incline us to duty, and teaches us where to obtain strength for the performance of it. The duty it enjoins is nothing less than a supreme delight in heavenly things: but at the same time it animates us by the consideration of the privileges we enjoy and the prospects we have in view. What the Christian

Christian possesses in these respects may be seen in the words before us: in which we notice,

I. His exalted state—

The Christian is a paradox; being both dead and living at the same time. He is "dead"—

[Once he was alive wholly and entirely to *legal hopes* and *carnal enjoyments:* but now he is dead to both. He now sees that he has no righteousness of his own for his justification before God, and no strength of his own for the fulfilment of God's holy will: he therefore renounces all dependence on himself, and seeks righteousness and strength in Christ alone[a]———

As for the enjoyment of the things of time and sense, he has the same capacity for it as ever; but he has lost his inclination for it, and no longer seeks his happiness in it. He feels the emptiness and vanity of all sublunary good: and, whilst he is thankful for the portion of it that is committed to him, he regards the whole world as an object that is crucified, and is himself crucified unto it[b]———]

Yet is he alive in a far higher sense than ever he was before—

[He has in Christ a "life," whereby he is enabled to live unto his God, and to walk in the paths of holiness and peace———This life is "hid with Christ in God;" so that, whilst the world seeth it not, Satan is not able to destroy it. When Adam had life, so to speak, in his own possession, his great Adversary prevailed over him and slew him: the Believer therefore is placed beyond the reach of Satan's efforts, and has his life treasured up in heaven, whither Satan has no access, and in God, over whom he can have no power———Indeed Christ himself liveth in the Believer[c], and is "his very life." What the soul is to the body, that is Christ to the Believer's soul, acting in all its faculties, and operating in all its energies——— And hence the Believer, however dead he is in himself, is enabled to live in a way that no other creature in the universe can live.]

But the Believer must be yet further viewed by us in,

II. His glorious expectations—

The Saviour, though once as unknown by the world as they, and still more despised, shall one day appear again in glory—

[The time is fast approaching, when he shall descend from heaven in his own glory, and in the glory of his Father and his holy angels. Whilst he was upon earth, his glory was, for the most

[a] Isai. xlv. 24. [b] Gal. vi. 14. [c] Gal. ii. 20.

most part, veiled. A little of it shined forth on Mount Tabor; and his own more immediate followers "beheld somewhat of his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father." But "the world knew him not:" "the darkness could not apprehend his light:" but in the day of judgment his appearance will be such as becomes his august character, so that he will be equally acknowledged by all, whether friends or enemies, as "King of kings and Lord of lords"———]

Then will the whole assembly of Believers appear with him in glory—

[They will be gathered from every quarter of the globe "to meet their Lord in the air," every one of them with "bodies like unto his glorious body," and souls like unto his glorified soul: for they will be altogether "like him, when they shall see him as he is[d]." They will then appear as *monuments of his grace*, as *trophies of his victory*, as *heirs of his glory*. Truly he will be admired and glorified in them, when it shall be seen what sovereignty he has exercised in the choice of them, and what power he has put forth for their salvation[e]. It will then be seen, not that *they* triumphed, but that *he* triumphed *for* them, (upon his cross[f],) and *over* them, (by his converting grace[g],) and *in* them, by the sanctifying efficacy of his Word and Spirit[h]——— Then will they be seated with him upon his throne, and as "joint-heirs with him" be partakers of his kingdom for evermore———]

ADDRESS—

1. Let Believers be sensible of the distinguished mercy vouchsafed unto them—

["Who is like unto you, O people saved by the Lord?" Behold the unregenerate world: they are "dead," it is true; but to what are they dead? Not to self, but to God and to every thing that concerns the soul; whilst you are dead to the law, and to sin, and to the world, and alive unto God, through Jesus Christ. Light and darkness are not more different from each other, than is the spiritual from the natural man, and the regenerate man from him that remains dead in trespasses and sins. And who has put the difference between you and the unbelieving world? Who has made you Children of God and heirs of glory, whilst so many millions of your fellow-creatures have the wicked one for their father, and everlasting misery as their portion? Verily, if you do not bless and adore your God, and rend the air with your hosannahs, the very stones will cry out against you.]

2. Let

[d] 1 John iii. 2. [e] 2 Thess. i. 10. [f] Col. i. 15.
[g] Ps. xlv. 5. 2 Cor. x. 5. [h] John x. 28.

2. Let them endeavour to walk worthy of their high calling—

[*This* is the entire scope both of the preceding and the following context. "Set your affections on things above," "*for* ye are dead," &c. Then after the text it is added, "Mortify *therefore* your members upon earth." *This* should be the effect of all God's mercies to us: and I call on every one who professes to have received life from Christ, to give evidence of that life, by "walking in all things as Christ walked"———]

MLV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SANCTIFICATION.

Col. iii. 11. *Christ is all, and in all.**

IN order to ascertain the true sense of any passage of Scripture, two things are to be attended to: we should mark the scope of the context, and compare the terms or phrases with similar passages of Holy Writ. By separating these canons of interpretation, we shall often overlook the true meaning of God's word, and put upon it a forced construction; whereas, if we unite them, we shall almost always find its just import.

It is undeniable that the verses which precede and follow our text refer to sanctification*; nor is there any thing which properly relates to our justification: and therefore we have a strong presumptive ground for interpreting the words of our text in reference to the new nature, which is spoken of in the verse immediately before it: nor could any thing but the peculiarity of the expression lead one for a moment to look for any other sense. But it seems that to interpret the word "Christ," as meaning the image of Christ, or the New Man, is to take a great, and almost an unwarrantable, liberty with Scripture. Nevertheless, if we compare

* The author has formerly treated this text as Commentators in general have done, in reference to our justification before God: (See 500th Skeleton.) But he apprehends on further consideration, that it refers rather to our sanctification. In either sense, the position is true, that "Christ is all;" but the latter interpretation seems more exactly to convey the mind of the Spirit in this passage. The Reader, by comparing the two statements, will be enabled to judge for himself.

* See ver. 1—14.

compare some other passages with the text [b], we shall find that we are fully authorized to put this construction upon it, and that there is no necessity to understand it in any other way than that which the context so evidently requires.

The meaning then of the words before us is simply this. We should be daily putting off our old and corrupt nature, and be putting on a new and holy nature; because nothing else will be at all regarded by God: whatever advantages we possess, we have nothing, if we be not holy: on the other hand, whatever disadvantages we labour under, we shall suffer no loss, if we be holy: for the image of "Christ" on the soul "is all, in all" persons, and under all circumstances: where that is, God will be pleased; and where that is not, he will be eternally displeased.

In order to confirm this momentous truth, we shall shew, that, in the eyes of God, *our restoration to the Divine image "is all in all."* It is,

I. The one scope of all his plans—

What did he design in the redemption of the world at large?

[When first he determined to rescue man from perdition, he decreed that he would "create us anew in Christ Jesus *unto good works*, in which he ordained that we should walk [c]."

The means which he used for the accomplishment of our salvation had especial respect to this end, not to save us *in* our sins, but *from* them [d].

He sent his only dear Son to take our nature, and in that nature to live, to die, to rise again. But in all this he aimed, not at our happiness merely, but our restoration to the image which we had lost [e]. This is specified in terms peculiarly strong and energetic,

[b] See 2 Cor. xiii. 5. where "Christ in us" must be understood of his image, because it is that whereby we are to ascertain whether we be in the faith. See also Gal. iv. 19. where "Christ formed in us" cannot be understood of Christ *personally*, but of Christ *spiritually*, i. e. of his image. Above all, see Rom. xiii. 14. where the very metaphor which occurs in our context, is used. "Put on the new man," says our context, "for Christ," i. e. the putting on of Christ, or of the new man, "is all." And, in the passage referred to, is the very expression, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."

[c] Eph. ii. 10. [d] Mat. i. 21. Acts iii. 26.

[e] Gal. i. 4. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. & ii. 24. Tit. ii. 14.

getic, in order that we may not overlook this truth as if it were only of secondary importance[f].

He gave his Holy Spirit also for the same end: he gave him to humble us[g], to renew us[h], to mortify all our vile lusts and passions[i], to fashion us after the Divine image[k], and to perfect that image in our souls[l].]

What does he design in imparting that redemption to individuals?

[Wherefore did he choose any of us from before the foundation of the world? It was "that we might be holy, and without blame before him in love[m]." Why has he revealed his grace in our hearts? It was to "teach us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world[n]." If he apply his promises to our souls, or hide his face from us, it is alike for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness[o]." Whatever be his dispensations towards us, "this is his will, even our sanctification[p];" and this is his ultimate design in all, even to "carry on the good work he has begun[q]," to "sanctify us wholly[r]," and to "perfect that which concerneth us[s]."]

But holiness is also,

II. The one object of his regard—.

Nothing but that is regarded by him in this world—

[The external ordinances of religion are not only worthless, but even hateful, in his sight, if destitute of solid piety[t]. On the other hand, the smallest particle of genuine goodness is not overlooked by him[u]. Even the semblance of it has sometimes been rewarded by him, in order that he might shew to mankind how great a value he has for it, where it really exists[x]. One single disposition is declared by him to be of great price in his sight[y]. The purposes which have never been realized in act, are highly commended by him[z]. And wherever he sees a person labouring to do his will, he invariably reveals to him his love in a more abundant measure[a], and communicates to him his richest blessings[b].]

Nothing

[f] Eph. v. 25—27. [g] John xvi. 8—11. [h] Tit. iii. 5, 6.
[i] Rom. viii. 13.
[k] Eph. iv. 23, 24. with 2 Cor. i. 22. A "seal" is an impress of the Divine image; and an "earnest" is the commencement of heavenly purity and joy.
[l] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [m] Eph. i. 4. [n] Tit. ii. 11, 12.
[o] 2 Cor. vii. 1. with Heb. xii. 10. [p] 1 Thess. iv. 3.
[q] Phil. i. 6. [r] 1 Thess. v. 23. [s] Ps. cxxxviii. 8.
[t] Isai. i. 11—16. [u] 1 Kin. xiv. 13. [x] 1 Kin. xxi. 29.
[y] 1 Pet. iii. 4. [z] 1 Kin. viii. 18. [a] John xiv. 23.
[b] Isai. lviii. 10, 11.

Nothing but that will be regarded by him in the world to come—

[When we shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, the inquiry will be, not, What we have professed, but What we have done[c]: and a Gentile who has served God according to the light that he enjoyed, will be preferred before the Christian, who has not made a suitable improvement of his superior advantages[d]. Apparently trivial occurrences will be noticed in that day; and rewards will be dispensed, not according to the greatness and splendor of our actions, but according to their intrinsic qualities, and to the principle evinced by them[e]. We must not indeed imagine that there is any *merit* in our poor services, for there is imperfection in them all; and, "if we had done all that is commanded us, we should be only unprofitable servants:" but God delights in holiness; and wherever he beholds it, he will, of his own grace and mercy, bestow upon it a proportionate reward, exalting those to the highest thrones in glory, who have made the greatest improvement of the talents committed to them[f].

There will be no distinction made, except what is grounded on the different degrees of conformity to the Divine image which the different individuals have attained. God will not respect the circumcised more than the uncircumcised, or the rich and learned more than the poor and illiterate. In all persons equally the image of Christ will be sought for; and the possession, or want of it, will determine their eternal state: "Christ will then be, as he now is, all, and in all.]

We conclude with INQUIRING, *Who amongst you is like-minded with God?*

1. Ye children of this world—

[How far are ye from according with God! With him, *Christ* is all; with you, *the world*. If ye may but enjoy the pleasures, the honours, the riches of the world, ye care not about the image of Christ: to be rich in faith and good works is not the object of your ambition: *that* you leave to the old, the sick, the enthusiasts. But ah! if Christ be *all*, as indeed he is, think what a vanity ye are pursuing: think how poor ye will be in the day of judgment; and how you will then execrate your present ways. Be persuaded to be wise in time: and beg without delay that "Christ may be made unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption[g]."

2. Ye self-deceiving professors—

[How many are there in the Church, who will talk about Christ, and speak of him as the ground of all their hopes, while yet

[c] Matt. vii. 21—23. & xxv. 31—46.
[d] Rom. ii. 25—27.
[e] Mat. x. 42.
[f] Matt. xxv. 19—23.
[g] 1 Cor. i. 30.

yet they are shamefully destitute of his image! Yes, grievous it is to say, that there are "many vain-talkers and deceivers" now, as well as in the Apostolic age; many that are proud and passionate; many that are earthly-minded and covetous; many that are unchaste and lewd; many that are deceitful in their words, and dishonest in their dealings; many in short, whose tempers, and dispositions, and conduct, are a disgrace to their profession. Know ye, if such there be here present, that ye are as unlike to God as Satan himself is; and that all your knowledge, all your experiences, and all your professions, will only aggravate your condemnation, if you die in your present state[h]. You do well to rely on Christ, and to make him your *all* in point of dependence; but know for a certainty, that, however you may pretend to trust in him, you never can be saved by him, unless you become new creatures[i]: for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord[k]."

3. Ye true Believers—

[You can appeal to God that you are like-minded with him in this grand point; and that you desire as much to be saved from sin, as to be delivered from hell itself. This is a blessed evidence that ye are born of God[l]. While ye are thus panting after holiness, ye have nothing to fear; your faith is sound[m], your hope is Scriptural[n], and saving[o]. Go on then from grace to grace, from strength to strength[p]. Be daily putting off the old man with its lusts[q], and putting on the new man with all its characteristic graces[r]. Be "growing up thus into Christ in all things as your living Head[s]," till you have arrived at "the full measure of the stature of Christ[t]:" and when you have attained a perfect meetness for the enjoyment of your God, you shall be like him, and with him for ever[u].]

[h] Job xxxvi. 13.
[i] 1 John iii. 10.
[k] Heb. xii. 14.
[l] 2 Cor. 5. 17.
[m] Jam. ii. 22.
[n] 1 John iii. 3.
[o] Rom. v. 5. & viii. 24.
[p] 2 Pet. iii. 18.
[q] ver. 8, 9.
[r] ver. 12, 13.
[s] Eph. iv. 15.
[t] ib. ver. 13.
[u] 1 John iii. 2.

MLVI.

LOVE TO THE SCRIPTURES RECOMMENDED.

Col. iii. 16. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.*

IT was declared to be one of the principal advantages which the Jews enjoyed above the Heathen, that they had "the Oracles of God committed to them[a]:" and we

[a] Rom. iii. 1, 2.

we are still more highly privileged, in that we have in our hands the New-Testament Scriptures, whereby we are enabled to understand the writings of Moses and the Prophets more fully than the writers themselves understood them. What part of the Christian records the Colossians could possess, we do not exactly know: we are sure that the Sacred Canon was not yet complete; nor were the different Epistles which are come down to us, collected into one volume. It is probable enough that one or two of the Gospels might have been seen by them: and the possession of such a treasure would be a very sufficient ground for the exhortation before us. To *us* who enjoy a complete collection of all that God has ever seen fit to reveal, at least,—as much of it as is at all necessary for our edification and comfort,—the exhortation may be addressed with proportionably greater weight. To impress it the more powerfully upon your minds, we shall take occasion from it to shew you, in what light the Sacred Volume should be regarded, and in what manner it should be improved.

I. In what light it should be regarded—

The word which has been transmitted to us was written by different men, in different and distant ages of the world. But though it was written by men, it is indeed the word of God; because those holy men wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost[b]. Indeed, the word is, properly and strictly speaking, "the word of Christ"—

[Our blessed and adorable Lord ministered to the Church not only before his incarnation, but from the very beginning of the world. It was He who preached by Noah to the antediluvian world[c]. It was He who inspired all the Prophets in all succeeding ages of the Church; and enabled them to testify beforehand respecting his future sufferings and glory[d]. Thus was he the real Author of the Old Testament. With respect to the New Testament, whatever is revealed there must also be traced to the same source. It was Christ who taught his Apostles, and who "by his Spirit brought all things to their remembrance," and, in a personal appearance to Saul, revealed to him the whole scheme

[b] 2 Pet. i. 21.
[c] 1 Pet. iii. 18—20.
[d] 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

scheme and plan of Redemption[e]. What the Apostles spake in his name, they affirmed to be, not the word of man, but of God[f]: and what they wrote in their Epistles, they declared to be "the commandment of their Lord[g]." Hence every part of the Sacred Volume is justly called by the Apostle "the word of Christ."]

In this view it ought to be regarded by us—

[Let us suppose that the Lord Jesus Christ were now to come amongst us, and to teach in our churches, as once he did in the streets and synagogues of Judea: Should we not, if we knew him to be that very Jesus, listen to him with the deepest attention? Should we not revolve in our thoughts the various subjects of his discourse, and labour to ascertain their true import? If we could suppose him now addressing us from the cross, and appealing to his sufferings as an unquestionable demonstration of his love, and an irresistible argument for our adherence to him; should we not be melted to tears? should we not be ready to exclaim, "What have we to do any more with idols?" "Other lords have had dominion over us; but by Thee only will we make mention of thy name." Or lastly, let us suppose that we saw the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God[h]; let us suppose he spake to us now, as once he did from Mount Sinai, with thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquakes, and the sound of the trumpet waxing louder and louder[i]; should we not tremble? should we not be ready to engage, as the Israelites did, "All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient?" Were we to hear him speaking to us in any of these ways, the word would not more certainly be *his*, than this word is, which we now possess: and therefore whatever sentiments of fear or love or gratitude we should feel on account of such revelations of his will, we ought to feel in reference to that Sacred Volume which we have in our hands: whenever we look upon it, we should say, This is the word of Him who came down from heaven to instruct me; of Him who died upon the cross to save me; of Him who now sits enthroned in glory, and will hereafter fix my doom according to it[k].]

Let us next inquire,

II. In what manner it should be improved—

We should not merely regard it with pious veneration, but should make use of it,

1. For the furnishing of our minds—

[It is to little purpose to have the Scriptures in our houses, unless we read them diligently, and acquire a practical and experimental knowledge of them. As the tables of the Law were deposited

[e] Gal. i. 11, 12. [f] 1 Thess. ii. 13. [g] 1 Cor. xiv. 37.
[h] Acts vii. 56. [i] Heb. xii. 18, 19. [k] John xii. 48.

deposited within the ark, so should the whole "word of God be hid within our hearts." It should "dwell in us;" it should dwell in us "richly:" its *precepts* should be treasured up in our minds, that we may know what the will of the Lord is: its *promises* should be precious to us, that we may be able to plead them at the throne of Grace, and obtain the accomplishment of them to our own souls: nor should its *threatenings* be overlooked, but rather be considered as kind and salutary admonitions which are given us for our good.

It will be said by many, that their memory is defective, and that they cannot retain the things which they read or hear: but if we made a practice of selecting daily some short portion of Scripture for our meditation throughout the day, the most ignorant amongst us would soon attain a knowledge which at present appears far beyond his reach.]

2. For the regulating of our conduct—

[Speculative knowledge, for the most part, administers only to pride and contention. That which alone is valuable to the Christian, is practical. The Scriptures are designed to lead him to such wisdom and discretion as will be in vain sought for from any other source. Indeed "*all* wisdom" is to be "drawn from these wells of salvation." The person whose mind is cast into the mould of the Scripture, will view every thing as God views it: he will have the same practical judgment as God himself has. "Good and evil, light and darkness," will not be confounded in his mind, as they are in the minds of ungodly men: he will distinguish them with ease, except in cases that are very obscure and complicated: by means of the spiritual discernment which he has obtained, he will be able to judge of the conduct of others, whilst they are not able to appreciate his[l]: and as far as his actions are regulated by his principles, he will be a light to all around him; and they shall be constrained to "acknowledge that God is with them of a truth." Indeed it is for this end that God sets up a light in his people's souls; "not that it may be put under a bushel, but that it may be set on a candlestick, and give light to all that are in the house;" and that the person possessing it may be able to say to all around him, "Whatsoever ye have seen and heard in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you."]

That we may ENFORCE the exhortation in our text, we would remind you, that a love to the Scriptures is,

1. An inseparable attendant on true piety—

[Look at the most distinguished saints, and see how they regarded the Inspired Records. Job esteemed the words of God's mouth more than his necessary food[m]: Jeremiah found them the joy

[l] 1 Cor. ii. 14, 15.

[m] Job xxiii. 12.

joy and rejoicing of his heart[n]:" and to David they were "sweeter than honey and the honey-comb[o]." Let not us then think that we have any title to be classed with those holy men, if we do not resemble them in this particular — — —]

2. A necessary means of advancement in every part of the divine life—

[Have we been only just quickened from the dead? we cannot but love that which has been the means of giving us life[p]. Are we as new-born babes? we must of necessity "desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby[q]." Are we arrived at the strength and stature of youth? "that word must abide within us, in order that we may be able to overcome" the great adversary of our souls[r]. In a word, whatever state we be in, it is "by them that we are to be furnished for every good word and work[s]."]

[n] Jer. xv. 16. [o] Ps. xix. 10. [p] Ps. cxix. 93.
[q] 1 Pet. ii. 2. [r] 1 John ii. 14. [s] 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

MLVII.

THE RELATIVE DUTIES EXPLAINED.

Col. iii. 18. to iv. 1. *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men; knowing, that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons. Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.*

IT is often a matter of complaint with some, that many who have been ordained to preach the Gospel leave the great and mysterious doctrines of the Gospel on the back ground, and bring forward little else than dry morality. But, whatever ground there may be for that complaint, it may be well to inquire, Whether there be not too much reason to complain of another class, who pay such exclusive attention to the doctrines, as almost entirely

entirely to overlook the duties of the Gospel? Amongst some it would be almost thought superfluous, and even wrong, to devote an entire discourse to the subject of moral duties; since, according to their views, the discharge of them may well be left to the simple operation of faith, without any distinct statement of them from the teachers of Christianity. But so thought not the apostle Paul. On the contrary, in those two epistles (to the Ephesians, and Colossians) in which he enters most deeply into the mysteries of Christianity, he enlarges most fully on the relative duties. We are persuaded that a similar plan ought to be adopted by every Minister of Christ. We should have no exclusive preference for doctrines or duties, but should put each in their place, and bring them both forward in their proper season. Convinced of this, we enter with great pleasure on the consideration of our relative duties; that is, of the duties,

I. Of husbands and wives—

It is worthy of observation, that, not in this place only, but in all other places where the Apostles speak of the relative duties, they mention those of the inferior first. The reason of this seems to be, that the duties of the inferior arise solely from the command of God, and are totally independent of the conduct of the superior; so that no neglect of duty on the one part can justify any neglect of it on the other. Agreeably therefore to the Apostolic plan, we shall notice the duty,

1. Of wives—

[To you are assigned obedience and subjection; partly, because you were created after man, and for the sake of man; and partly because you were first in the transgression, and were the means of bringing ruin upon man and upon all his posterity[n]. The extent to which obedience to your husband is required of you is indeed exceeding great: it reaches to every thing that is not contrary to the will of God: it is, if I may so speak, co-extensive with the obedience which the Church owes to the Lord Jesus Christ; and your obedience is due to your husband, as to the Lord himself. I am aware that this expression is very strong; but I conceive it is not at all stronger than the declarations of St. Paul.

[n] 1 Tim. ii 11 14. with Gen. iii. 16.

Paul. True, in the text it is only said, "Submit yourselves, *as it is fit* in the Lord:" but in the Epistle to the Ephesians he draws the very parallel that I have drawn, and shews that your duty to your husband corresponds exactly with the Church's duty to the Lord Jesus Christ: "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, *as unto the Lord:* for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church: and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, *as* the Church is subject unto Christ, *so* let the wives be to their own husbands *in every thing*[b]." (Of course, this will be understood of obedience only, and not of dependence; for that were absurd and impious in the extreme.) In the whole of this obedience, she must feel that it is due to him by God's special appointment: that he is her head, and her lord, whom she is bound, not only to obey, but to obey with "reverence[c]," "even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord[d]."

This may be thought to sound harsh by those who are not accustomed to consider what the Scripture speaks on this subject: but it will not be thought so, if we contemplate what God has required,]

2. Of husbands—

[Your duty, is to "love your wives," and never on any occasion to entertain an unkind feeling towards them. A proud, haughty, imperious carriage towards them is most offensive to God, who will regard every harsh, bitter, or contemptuous expression towards them as an abuse of your authority and a violation of his commands. Though he has constituted you lords, he has not authorized you to be tyrants; but requires you to be precisely such lords over your wives, as Christ is over his Church. You are to govern, it is true; but you are to govern only for the good of the wife: you are to seek only, and at all times, her best interests, and to promote to the utmost of your power her real happiness. You must not require any thing unreasonable at her hands, nor ever fail to recompense with testimonies of your love the efforts which she makes to please you. Nor must you merely endeavour to render her happy, but you must be ready to make great sacrifices for this end. What the Lord Jesus Christ has done for his Church, is set forth as the proper model and pattern of your duty towards your wife: "Husbands, love your wives, *even as Christ also loved the Church*, and GAVE HIMSELF FOR IT." Oh! what an example is here! Methinks, no wife would complain of the obedience that is required of her, if the authority of her husband were exercised in such a way as this: on the contrary, obedience on her part would be her chief delight. Know then, ye husbands, that this is the duty assigned to you: if your wives are to be obedient, as the Church is to Christ, ye also on your part are to be loving, even

[b] Eph. v. 22—24. [c] ib. ver. 33. [d] 1 Pet. iii. 1, 5, 6.

even as Christ is to the Church. "Your wives should be to you as your own flesh. Now no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord does the Church[e]:" and precisely in the same way should you exercise all imaginable tenderness towards your wives, and be as careful of paining them as you would be of suffering any thing to wound the apple of your eye.]

Next to the duties of husbands and wives will naturally follow those,

II. Of parents and children—

Here again we are called, in the first place, to notice those of the inferior:

1. Of children—

[Obedience is your duty also: nor is there any limit to the exercise of this duty, except where you are required to violate a command of God. Reason indeed is sufficient to teach you this: for your own ignorance and inexperience must of necessity direct you to look up to your parents for instruction and guidance. But revelation teaches you to regard the authority of your parents as God's authority, and to consider obedience to *them* as obedience to *him*. In fulfilling the commands of parents, there should be no reluctance: on the contrary, to please, and serve, and honour his parents should be the desire and delight of every child. He should have no wish to shake off their yoke; no desire to act independently of them. Nor let this be thought hard: for God has annexed a special promise to the fulfilment of this duty: the command relating to it is said to be "the first commandment with promise[f];" and it is generally to be observed, that the blessing of God does rest in a more especial manner, throughout the whole of their lives, on those who have honoured and obeyed their earthly parents. This may be accounted for on natural principles; for the dispositions which are exercised in filial obedience argue a degree of self-government, which will go far to render a man both amiable and prosperous in every situation and condition of life. But besides this, the blessing of God will assuredly rest on such characters; and He, as the universal Parent, will recompense into their bosom their compliance with this command.]

2. Of parents—

[Both in the text, and in the parallel passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians, there is a restraint laid on parents with regard to the exercise of their authority: it is not to be attended with harshness or severity, "lest they provoke their children to anger, and discourage them" from attempting to fulfil their duty, under the idea, that, whatever efforts they may use to please their parents, it will be a hopeless task. Parents have much to answer for, when

[e] Eph. v. 28, 29, 33. [f] Eph. vi. 1—3.

when they produce such an effect as this on their children's minds. If on the one hand it be said, that "there is much folly in the heart of a child, and that the rod of correction must drive it out," it must be remembered, on the other hand, that the mind of a child may soon be cast down, and that we may by harsh restrictions and undue severity augment that very rebellion which we endeavour to subdue. There can be no doubt but that many parents harden their children's hearts against their authority in the first instance, and ultimately against the authority of God himself, purely by the tyranny which they exercise, and by the continual irritations which they occasion[g]: and in the last day they will be found, in too many instances, the prime movers, and the real causes of their children's eternal ruin. Fathers, be upon your guard respecting this; and instead of thus driving your children to despondency, endeavour to bring them up in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord[h]." See in what way God dealeth with his children, how he bears with their infirmities, and consults their best interests[i]: so should you do[k], and like Abraham of old, be solicitous only for their eternal welfare[l].]

There is yet one other relation specified in the text, namely, that,

III. Of masters and servants—

It has pleased God that there should be different ranks and orders of society, and that to each should be assigned appropriate duties. We notice those,

1. Of servants—

[Your rank in society is ordered of the Lord: nor, when you hear in what light you are viewed by him, will you see any reason to repine at it. By virtue of your office you are required to "obey those who are your masters according to the flesh:" and to obey them cheerfully too, and without reserve. Nor in the discharge of this duty are you to act in the absence of your master any otherwise than you would in his immediate presence: you are to render obedience "in singleness of heart, *as unto Christ;* not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but *as the servants of Christ*, doing *the will of God* from the heart[m]." What an elevated view does this give of your situation and employments! You appear to be servants of *men:* and so indeed you are: but you are servants of *the Lord Jesus Christ:* and it is your privilege to consider yourselves as living in *his* service, as much as if he were to come down to sojourn again on earth, and to admit you into the number of his domestics. Whatever your particular office be, you

[g] That is an humiliating view which the Apostle gives of parents, but, alas! how true in too many instances! Heb. xii. 10.

[h] Eph. vi. 4. [i] Ps. ciii. 8—13. [k] 1 Thess. ii. 11.

[l] Gen. xviii. 19. [m] Eph. vi. 5, 6.

you are privileged, so to speak, as altogether to forget your servitude to man, and to consider yourselves as performing the office of angels in the service of your God and Saviour. It is your privilege also to expect your wages from *him*. What you receive from man, is for your body only: but you shall have wages for your soul also, even "the reward of an eternal inheritance[n]." This is represented as the state even of *slaves*, and of those who were called to serve Jewish or Heathen masters: how much more then is it the happy state of you who live in Christian families, and especially where God in Christ Jesus is loved and feared! Yes, "whether ye be bond or free, your Master, your work, your wages, are the same[o]." Act then agreeably to this exalted view of your station. Even though you should have "froward and unkind masters," still act the same: and, if your work is thereby rendered the more difficult, your reward shall be proportionably advanced[p].]

2. Of masters—

[As your servants are to put you in the place of Christ, so are you to be as in the place of Christ to them: and, exactly such a Master as he, if in your place, would be, such are ye to be to those who are under your command. Would he never be unreasonable in his expectations or commands? So neither are ye to be. Would he be kind and indulgent? So must ye be. Would he delight to make his servants happy; and would he consult in all things their eternal welfare? So are you to act, "*doing* in your station *the same things to them*," as they in theirs are required to do to you[q]. Especially must you "forbear all threatening" words or looks; "remembering that you also have a Master in heaven," with whom there is no respect of persons," and who, as their avenger, will call you to an account for all acts of unkindness or oppression towards the meanest of mankind. In a word, see how your God directs and governs you; and let him be your model for your government of those whom he has graciously committed to your care.]

We may SEE here,

1. The extent and excellence of true religion—

[Religion enters into every situation and relation of life. It finds the whole world disordered, like a body every joint of which from head to foot is dislocated: but by its operation on the hearts of men it sets every joint in its place, and diffuses through the whole a divine unction, whereby every joint is set at liberty, and performs with ease its proper functions. Those in a higher and more honourable station despise not those which are lower and less honourable; neither are they envied by them: but each

[n] See the text. [o] Eph. vi. 8. [p] 1 Pet. ii. 18—20.
[q] Eph. vi. 9.

each occupies with content and satisfaction the place assigned it by its Maker, and finds its own happiness in contributing, according to its ability, to the good of the whole. If it be said, that these effects are not visible in the world, even amongst those who profess religion; I answer, that this only shews how little there is of true religion in the world. The first ages of the Church display in all its beauty the native tendency of Christianity: and, if the same effects are not alike visible now, it is not owing to any want of efficiency in religion itself, but to the low state of religion in the world. In proportion as vital godliness prevails, it does, and ever must, manifest its practical influence upon the heart and life.]

2. The importance of studying the character of Christ—

[Christ ought to be well known to us in his work and offices as the Saviour of the world. But we must not confine our attention to his Mediatorial work: we must also contemplate him as an example which we are to follow in every part of our conduct both towards God and man. Behold him as a son and a servant; what an entire devotion was there in him to his Father's will! It was his meat and drink to do it. View him also as the Husband and Lord of his Church; what inconceivable love and kindness does he exercise towards her at all times, notwithstanding her innumerable defects! Let us then study his character; and whether we move in the higher or inferior relation, let it be the one aim of our lives to walk in his steps, and to follow his example.]

3. The way in which to judge of our spiritual attainments—

[Religion is a practical thing, and is intended, as we have shewn, to make us fill to advantage every relation in life. Now I grant that there are many who discharge in a most commendable manner their relative duties, whilst yet they have no regard for God in their hearts. Consequently, I cannot exactly say, that the fulfilment of relative duties will stamp you as religious characters: but this I must say, that the not discharging of these aright will prove to demonstration, either that "your religion is altogether vain," or that it is at a very low ebb indeed. But supposing that there be no manifest neglect of these duties, I would ask, How much is there of *God* in them? Is the authority which you either obey or exercise, regarded as *God's*? Is his will considered as the rule of all that you do, and his glory as the end? Here is the point to be inquired into: it is this which makes your actions pleasing and acceptable to him: and I may add, that it is this which will make obedience easy and delightful to yourselves. Habituate yourselves then to realize the thought, that it is Christ whom you serve, or in whose place you stand whilst

whilst others are serving you. So shall your whole deportment become exquisitely pure, and holy, and refined; and you will "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

MLVIII.

TRUE PIETY DESCRIBED.

1 Thess. i. 2—4. *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, Brethren beloved, your election of God.*

THIS Epistle, though not placed first in the sacred Canon, is generally supposed to have been the first in point of time: and in point of tenderness and affection, it is certainly inferior to none. The Church at Thessalonica was subjected to heavy trials. In their first reception of the word, they sustained grievous opposition [a]; and, in their subsequent profession of it, they endured a great fight of afflictions, being no less cruelly persecuted by their own countrymen than the Apostles were by the Jews [b]. From them St. Paul had been driven by the fury of his blood-thirsty enemies [c], who had followed him even to Berea with the most relentless animosity [d]. No wonder therefore that he felt extremely anxious for his new converts, under a situation of such peril. Gladly would he have returned to them again and again: but his watchful and malicious adversaries would not suffer it [e]. Hence his anxiety for them became extreme; so that he could no longer endure the suspense he was in concerning them. The presence of Timothy with him at Athens was of great importance: yet on the whole he thought it better to be left at Athens alone, that, by sending Timothy to them, he might gain certain information of their state, and promote their establishment in the faith [f]. After Timothy's return to him, he wrote them this epistle. It is an epistle admirably calculated to impress the minds of all who read it, whether Ministers or people, and to shew

[a] ver. 6. [b] Ch. ii. 14. [c] Acts xvii. 5—10.
[d] ib. ver. 13, 14. [e] 1 Thess. ii. 18.

shew them what ardent affection should subsist between all who stand in that relation towards each other. In the commencement of it we see how ready he was to acknowledge and commend what was good in them: and herein he particularly instructs us how to minister with effect. Though doubtless it is the duty of every Minister to reprove and correct what he sees amiss in his people, his chief delight should be to comfort the feeble-minded, to support the weak, and to build up all in their most holy faith. The object he should continually aim at should be, to be "a helper of their joy."

In discoursing on the words which we have just read, we shall consider,

I. The graces which he had seen in them—

The great leading graces of Christianity are, "faith, hope, and charity." On these all other graces essentially depend; so that where these are, there will all others most assuredly be found. But of all these graces there are counterfeits: there is "a faith that is dead:" there is "a love, which is" little else than "dissimulation:" and there is "a hope of the hypocrite that perisheth." Such however were not the graces which had been exercised among them: in them he had seen,

1. An active faith—

[True faith is active: it brings to the Christian's view the Lord Jesus Christ, as having in him a fulness of all imaginable blessings treasured up for the use of the Church; just as the vine has in its root and trunk that sap, of which all the branches partake, and by which they are nourished [g]———Faith, moreover, brings him to Christ for daily supplies of those blessings which his various necessities require [h]———And having received communications of grace according to his necessities, he is stirred up by it to improve them to the glory of his Redeemer's name ———In a word, whatever the Christian has to do for God, he does it through the operation of this principle; by which, and by which alone, he overcomes the world [i], and purifies his heart [k]. This faith he had seen in his Thessalonian converts: yea, so eminently had it shone forth in them, that they were celebrated for it in almost every Church throughout all the Roman Empire, and were

[f] Ch. iii. 1, 2, 5. [g] Col. i. 19. Eph. i. 22, 23. John xv. 5.
[h] John i. 16. [i] 1 John v. 4. [k] Acts xv. 9.

were held forth as patterns and ensamples of it to all the Christian world[l]!]

2. A laborious love—

[Love is that fruit by which, above all, the truth and reality of faith will be discerned[m]. It is by this, above all, that we can assure ourselves[n], or be known to others[o], as faithful followers of Christ. If we have it not, all else that we can have is of no value[oo]. But love is a laborious grace: it is always seeking for something which it may *do*, either for God or man. It cannot endure to be idle. Whether it can do little or much, it delights to be doing what it can[p]. Nor is it diverted from its pursuit by slight obstacles: no; like the water obstructed by the dam, it will overcome them; and will evince its strength and ardor, in proportion to the difficulties that impede its exercise. Love is a self-denying grace: and where it exists in due measure, it will prompt a man not only to sacrifice ease and interest, but even to lay down his life itself for the brethren[q]. This grace was so conspicuous in the Thessalonian Converts, that St. Paul judged it quite unnecessary to write to them on the subject: they were so taught by God himself respecting all its duties and offices, that he could add nothing to them, but only exhort them to abound more and more in the conduct which they had already pursued[r].]

3. A patient hope—

[Hope is the offspring of faith and love, or at least of that faith which worketh by love. It is here called, "hope in our Lord Jesus Christ;" because "in him all the promises of God are yea, and amen." It is a patient grace, leading us to expect all that God has promised, however long we may have to wait for it[s]; and to fulfil all that God has required, to the utmost possible extent[t]; and to suffer all that God has ordained us to suffer, in hope of a final recompence[u]; and, finally, to continue in a constant course of well-doing, even to the end[x]. Such was the hope which the Thessalonians had maintained; and in which they had greatly rejoiced, even in the midst of all their afflictions[y].]

From considering the graces of these eminent Christians, we proceed to notice,

II. The effects produced by them in his own mind—

They excited in the Apostle's breast,

1. A lively interest in their welfare—

[A person less connected with them than he, could not but have

[l] ver. 7, 8.
[m] Gal. v. 6.
[n] 1 John iii. 14.
[o] John xiii. 35.
[oo] 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.
[p] Mark xiv. 8.
[q] 1 John iii. 16.
[r] Ch. iv. 9, 10.
[s] Rom. viii. 25.
[t] 1 John iii. 3.
[u] Heb. x. 34.
[x] Rom. ii. 7.
[y] ver. 6.

have admired such excellencies: but he was their father: he had begotten them in the Gospel[z]: and therefore he might well boast of them, as "his glory, and joy[a]." Accordingly we find that, "whenever he came into the presence of his God and Father[b]," he both gave thanks for them, and prayed for their still greater advancement in every thing that was good. Most exalted was the joy which he felt on their account[c]. When he saw the transcendent eminence of their attainments, he quite forgot all his own afflictions[d]: the sight inspired new life and vigour into him[e]: and he felt in himself a recompence, which richly repaid all that he had done and suffered for their sake.

This shews what are the views and feelings of every faithful Minister, when he sees his people adorning by their conduct the Gospel of Christ. Verily, as St. John says, "they have no greater joy than to see their children walk in truth[f]." This comforts them in all their approaches to the throne of Grace: this fills them with praises and thanksgivings to God." That so great an honour should be conferred on themselves; that such advantages should be imparted to their perishing fellow-creatures; and that such glory should be brought to God by their means; is to them a subject of almost stupifying amazement, and of overwhelming gratitude. And whilst they render thanks to God for these things, they pour out their hearts before him in prayers and supplications in their behalf. In a word, these things form a bond of union between a Minister and his people, such as exists not in the whole world besides.]

2. An assured confidence of their state—

[When he beheld these fruits produced by his converts, he "had no doubt of their election of God:" the graces they exercised were manifestly wrought in them by the power of God, who had wrought thus upon them in consequence of his own purpose which from all eternity he had purposed in himself[g].

The same blessed assurance we also may entertain, wherever the same ground for it exists. Assurance, so founded, can never be productive of any bad effect. It is only when persons pretend to be assured of their election on other grounds, that any evil can arise from it. If, for instance, a person found such a conceit on a dream, or vision, or strong impression on his own mind, then we would be among the first to bear testimony against him, as a wild enthusiast, and a self-deluding impostor. Against such a delusion we readily acknowledge that no terms of reprobation are too severe. But when such fruits as those which the Thessalonian converts produced are visible in any, then may we indulge the pleasing thought respecting them, as they also may

respecting

[z] Ch. ii. 13. [a] ib. ver. 20.
[b] We connect the close of ver. 3. with the word "remembering."
[c] Ch. iii. 9. [d] ib. ver. 6, 7. [e] ib. ver. 8. [f] 3 John 4.
[g] Eph. iii. 11. 2 Tim. i. 9.

respecting themselves, that "God loved them with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn them[h]." Only we may observe, that this assurance is no farther justifiable than it is warranted by the graces which exist in the soul: with the increase of those graces it may justly rise; and with the diminution of them it must proportionably fall. Any other assurance than this is unscriptural and vain: but this not only *may be* entertained, but is the privilege and comfort of all who believe in Christ.]

Happy should we be to IMPROVE this subject in such a way only as corresponds with the general tenor of the Apostle's address: but,

1. Must we not rather take up *a lamentation* over you?

[Of how small a part of our audience can we speak in the terms here used towards the Thessalonian converts! For, where are the works of faith, the labours of love, the patience of hope, of the generality amongst you? Where are those fruits which would warrant your Minister to say, that he "*knew* from them your election of God?" What is the faith of the generality, but a dead faith? what their love, but an empty name? what their hope, but presumption! We would not willingly speak thus, God knoweth? We would be glad to be found false accusers in this matter. Greatly should we rejoice to be convinced of our error, and to revoke every intimation we have here given. But, whilst the fruit produced by you is no other than what the world at large produce, we can address you in no other terms than those of grief and sorrow. If the fruit be bad, the tree must be bad also. Oh Brethren! examine well the daily operation and effect of your faith and love and hope; and then ask, Whether St. Paul would have exulted over you, as he did over the Thessalonian converts? and, if your own consciences testify, that he would have found no such cause for joy in you, then learn to relax your confidence of your state before God, and seek to be made "Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile."]

2. Suffer ye then yet farther a word of *exhortation*—

[To those who really possess and manifest the graces before described, we would say, be thankful to God for his electing love; and give him all the glory of whatever good there is in you. "Press onward too, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to what is before:" and never think that you have already attained, whilst any thing remains to be attained.

But to those in whom there is little or no evidence of such a work of grace we would say, For Christ's sake deceive not your own souls. *This* which you have seen in the Thessalonians is Christianity:

[h] Jer. xxxi. 3.

Christianity: and *this* is the state to which the Gospel is designed to bring you also: *this* too is the object of all our ministrations: and, if these graces be not wrought in your hearts, we consider ourselves as "labouring in vain, and running in vain." Whilst we see not this effect of our ministrations, how can we "give thanks for you?" or how, with any comfort, can we "make mention of you in our prayers?" Instead of rejoicing over you, we can only mourn and weep on your account[i]: and, instead of having the delightful thought of presenting you to God "as the children which God has given us[k]," we have the terrible apprehension that we shall prove swift witnesses against you to your eternal condemnation[l]. We pray you, Brethren, lay to heart these affecting considerations; and begin without delay to seek that entire change both of heart and life, which invariably characterizes the elect of God, and which alone can warrant any hope of happiness in the eternal world.]

[i] Jer. ix. 1. & xiii. 17. [k] ver. 19. with Isai. viii. 18.
[l] Mal. iii. 5.

MLIX.

THE MANNER IN WHICH THE GOSPEL BECOMES EFFECTUAL.

1 Thess. i. 5. *Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.*

IT is not uncommon for persons to be troubled in their minds respecting their interest in the Divine favour: they want to know whether they belong to the elect. But this a point which can never be ascertained, except in one way. No man can go up to heaven, and search the book of God's decrees: no man can turn over the pages of the book of life, to see whether his name be written there. The discovery must be made by an examination of our own heart and life. If we find the fruits of the Spirit within us, we know infallibly who the agent is that has produced them; and from such an undeniable evidence of God's love we may safely conclude, that we are elected of him. It was thus that St. Paul discerned the interest which the Thessalonians had in God's electing love. Their "fruits of faith, and labours of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus," flowing as they did from a

powerful

powerful operation of the Gospel upon their souls, left no doubt upon his mind respecting their state, but enabled him confidently to assert, that "he knew their election of God." He saw the fruit; nor was he at any loss to determine from what root it sprang.

It is for this fruit that we now purpose to inquire: and, in order that we may attain a just knowledge of our state, we shall shew,

I. When the word may be said to come in word only—

By "*our* Gospel" the Apostle means, that which he and his fellow-labourers, Timothy and Sylvanus, had preached to them, and which had "*come* to them" as sent and authorized by God himself. But notwithstanding its divine origin, it comes to many "in word only." Now it comes thus—

1. When it makes no impression on the minds of those who hear it—

[Many hear the Gospel for years, and yet never come to the knowledge of it. Not that they want a capacity to understand it; but they want an inclination to attend to it with that seriousness that it requires. They listen to the voice that utters it, but they do not reflect upon the subject itself; so that it passes through their minds, like a vessel in the ocean, leaving no trace behind. Our Lord compares them to the way-side, on which good seed is sown, but is instantly taken away again by the birds, so that none of it springs up[a]. It is truly said of them, that "hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand."]

2. When it makes no other impression than what mere moral suasion will produce—

[Oratory on some occasions will produce very powerful effects. Even the recital of some calamitous event will greatly affect the passions, and either rouse us to indignation, or melt us to tears. But these emotions are only transient: the memory of the things that caused them, vanishes away; and no abiding effect is produced. Thus it is with many who hear the Gospel. They are affected by it for a time: sometimes they are depressed with fear and terror, and sometimes elated with hope and joy: but they experience no radical change of heart and life. Such were many of Ezekiel's hearers: they were delighted with his eloquence, as people are with a performance of vocal or instrumental music; but their hearts were as much addicted to covetousness, and

[a] Matt. xiii. 4, 19.

and as averse to real piety as ever[b]. Such persons are represented by our Lord as the stony-ground hearers, who receive the word instantly and with joy; but, having no root in themselves, they quickly wither, and come to nought[c]. St. James also compares them to men who see their face in a glass, but go away and forget what manner of persons they are[d]. Whatever impressions therefore the Gospel may make upon them at the time, it certainly comes to them in word only.]

Such an application of the Gospel being of no value, we proceed to shew,

II. In what way it must come, in order to be effectual—

To whomsoever it be declared, whether to men of greater or less capacity, it must come,

1. With a divine energy to the soul—

[The Gospel is "the rod of God's strength," even that wonder-working rod whereby the most astonishing miracles are wrought[e]. By it "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life again[f]." Weak as it is in itself, even as the rod of Moses was, it is "mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong-holds of Sin and Satan; bringing, not the actions only, but even the thoughts, of men into captivity to the obedience of Christ[g]." This is "the sword which Christ girds upon his thigh[h]," and with which he subdues his enemies. It is "the sword of the Spirit" also[i]. It is, in short, that instrument whereby the Sacred Three accomplish all their mysterious purposes in converting and saving a ruined world. But then it must be wielded by an almighty arm: it must "come in demonstration of the Spirit and of power[k]" or else it will fail of producing any permanent effect. None but He who moved upon the chaos, and formed it into order and beauty, can new create the soul. Such a change may be wrought as we read of in Ezekiel's vision, where the dry bones came together, and the sinews and flesh came up upon them; but they were only a corpse still, till the Spirit breathed upon them: and then they rose up, even a great army[l]. Thus persons who are dead in sin, may be brought to a profession of religion by other means: but nothing short of a divine power can ever "turn men truly from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God[m]." Paul may plant, and Apollos may water; but it is God alone who can give the increase[n].]

2. With

[b] Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. [c] Matt. xiii. 5, 6, 20, 21. [d] Jam. i. 23, 24.
[e] Ps. cx. 2. [f] Matt. xi. 5. with Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.
[g] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. See also Jer. xxiii. 29. [h] Ps. xxxv. 3—5.
[i] Eph. vi. 17. [k] 1 Cor. ii. 4. [l] Ezek. xxxvii. 7—10.
[m] Acts xxvi. 18. [n] 1 Cor. iii. 5—7.

2. With an assured sense of its truth and excellence—

[One reason why the Gospel has so little effect, is, that "men do not mix faith with what they hear [o]." They regard it "rather as the word of men, than as the word of God [p]." In going to hear it, they consider themselves as going to hear *a man;* when they should rather go in the spirit of the Centurion and his friends, saying, "Behold, now we are all here present before thee, to hear all things that are commanded thee of *God* [q]." Moreover the Gospel should be viewed as a remedy, a remedy of God's providing, and exactly suited to our wants. We should go to hear it, as a hungry person goes to a feast: he will not be satisfied with barely looking upon the things that are set before him; he feels an appetite for them; he believes them to be good for him; and he partakes of them for his own personal benefit and satisfaction. When the Gospel comes in this manner, even as it did on the day of Pentecost, it lays open the whole heart [r]; it pierces deeper than a two-edged sword [s]; and heals the wounds that it inflicts [ss]. Then it is truly precious to the soul; sweeter than honey or the honey-comb; and more desirable than one's necessary food [t].]

Coming in this manner, the Gospel is of inestimable value; as will appear, while we consider,

III. What effects it will then produce—

It will work in us precisely as it did in those at Thessalonica: it will make us,

1. Imitators of Christ—

[The Thessalonian Christians instantly became "followers of Christ and of his Apostles [u]:" they made an open profession of Christianity, and consorted with those who were like-minded with themselves. In the same manner, all who "receive the truth in the love thereof" will "join themselves to the Church," without any fear of that reproach which their new profession will bring upon them. They have counted the cost, and are willing to pay it. They take up their cross cheerfully, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy all the pleasures and honours of the world [x]."

While they call themselves *followers* of Christ and his Apostles, they also become *imitators* of them [y]. They will no longer follow the course of this world; but will regulate their conduct by a higher standard: they will look to the example which Christ has

[o] Heb. iv. 2. [p] 1 Thess. ii. 13. [q] Acts x. 33.
[r] Acts ii. 37. 1 Cor. xiv. 25. [s] Heb. iv. 12.
[ss] Acts xvi. 29—34. [t] Ps. xix. 10. Job xxiii 12.
[u] ver. 6. [x] Heb. xi. 25, 26. [y] μιμηταί.

has set them, and endeavour to "walk as he walked." His meekness and gentleness, his humility and kindness, his patience and self-denial, his devotedness to God, and love to man, will be progressively transcribed into their hearts and lives; nor will they be satisfied till they arrive at the measure of the full stature of Christ[z]."]

2. Patterns to their Brethren—

[This also is mentioned, to the honour of the Thessalonians, as resulting from the manner in which the Gospel came to them[a]. And in this all true Christians will resemble them. One in whom the word has wrought effectually will not be contented with setting a good example to the world around him; (this would be a matter of no great difficulty:) he will make his light so to shine before men, that all, whether Believers or Unbelievers, may be edified by it. He would gladly say with the Apostle to all who behold him, "Whatsoever ye have seen and heard in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you[b]." This distinguished piety is not to be sought by Ministers only, (though doubtless they, with their peculiar advantages, ought not to be behind others in any thing that is good[c],) but by persons of every age, and of every class. All should endeavour to grow in grace, that from children they may become young men, and from thence advance till they are fathers in Christ[d]. And it is certain, that all who are perfect, or have attained to maturity in the Christian life, will be thus minded[e].]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. What reason for thankfulness *they* have, in whom the Gospel has wrought effectually—

[If we have experienced any spiritual change, we must trace it up to God, as the sole Author of it. The power that effected it was not in the word; for then the same change would have been wrought in all who heard it: nor was the distinction occasioned by our own superior wisdom or goodness; for then the wisest and most moral of men would uniformly be the most forward to receive the Gospel, whereas they are rather the most averse to it[f]. No: it was God alone who made us to differ[g]; and to Him alone must all the glory be ascribed[h].]

2. How we are to obtain benefit from the word delivered to us—

[If the mighty working of God's power be requisite, even of the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead[i], we should

[z] Eph. iv. 13, 15. [a] ver. 7. [b] Phil. iv. 9.
[c] 1 Tim. iv. 11. [d] 1 John ii. 12—14. [e] Phil. iii. 12—15.
[f] 1 Cor. i. 26—28. [g] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [h] John i. 13.
[i] Eph. i. 19, 20.

should implore his presence before we go up to his House; we should be lifting up our hearts in ejaculatory prayer while we are hearing his word; and, after the seed has been sown, we should water it with our prayers and tears. *This* is the way which God himself has prescribed [k]; and it would insure a blessing, because Christ himself is in the midst of his people, on purpose to bless those who call upon him in spirit and in truth [l]. It is owing to the want of this, both in Ministers and people, that the ordinances are so unprofitable [m]. Let us then abound more in the great duty of prayer [n]; and God will pour out his Spirit upon us [o]: He will give us that unction of the Holy One that shall teach us all things [p]; and make his word to be "the power of God to the salvation of our souls [q]."]

[k] Jam. i. 5. Prov. ii. 2—6. [l] Matt. xviii. 20.
[m] Jam. iv. 2. [n] Eph. i. 16—18. [o] John xvi. 13, 14.
[p] 1 John ii. 20, 27. [q] Rom. i. 16.

MLX.

SCOPE AND END OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

1 Thess. i. 9, 10. *They themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*

ST. PAUL delighted in bestowing commendation wherever it was due. When writing to the Church at Rome, he told them that "their faith was spoken of throughout the whole world [a];" and here he tells his Thessalonian converts, that their faith was so celebrated, that he heard of it wherever he went; insomuch that in every place he was anticipated in his commendations of them, the extraordinary effects of his ministry among them being in all the Churches a general topic of conversation. The particular effects which had been produced he here specifies: and, in considering them, we shall be led to shew,

I. What is the great end and object of our ministrations—

Ministers are ambassadors from God to man: they are sent with tidings of mercy to a rebellious world: but they are sent also to effect a moral change in the hearts

[a] Rom. i. 8.

hearts and lives of all who receive their message. They are sent to bring men,

1. To serve and obey their God—

[Even Christians, till converted by the Spirit of God, are universally addicted to idolatry. They do not indeed, like the Heathen world, bow down to stocks and stones; but they "love and serve the creature, more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore." "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," possess the supreme place in their affections, and are sought after in preference to God——To turn men from these vanities, and to bring them to their God, is the end for which every Minister is sent, and at which he should continually aim. And this, we trust, is the object which, in all our addresses, we have in view. Yes, we would bring you to serve the living God, who alone is worthy of your regard; for he alone has life in himself; and he alone can confer life on his devoted servants. But it is not a mere formal service to which we would bring you, but a total surrender of all your faculties and powers to him. This is your "reasonable service." There is none but God that has any claim upon you. What has the world done for you? or what can it ever do? To whom, or to what, are ye debtors, that ye should consult their wishes, or obey their will? But God has created you, yea, and has redeemed you by the blood of his only dear Son. Ye are therefore in no sense, and in no degree, your own: your bodies, and your spirits, are altogether his; and with them ye must glorify your God alone[b].]

2. To wait for the second coming of their Lord from heaven—

[He who once came down from heaven to suffer for us, and by his own obedience unto death hath "delivered us from the wrath to come," has been raised up from the dead, and is now exalted to the right hand of God, that he may carry on and perfect the work he has begun. And he will once more come down from heaven to gather together his elect, and to raise them to the fruition of that glory, which he has purchased for them. To wait in joyful expectation of that period is the privilege of all his people: and to bring you to such a state of mind is to be the incessant labour of his Ministers. We are not to be satisfied with seeing you born to God; but, as loving parents, we are to nourish you in our bosom; that under our fostering care ye may "grow to the full measure of the stature of Christ." This waiting posture, this constant readiness for the coming of your Lord, is one of the highest gifts to which any man can attain[c]. We speak not now of persons waiting, like criminals, for the arrival of their Judge; (that is a state from which it is the Christian's privilege to

[b] 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. [c] 1 Cor. i. 7.

to be delivered: but of their waiting as servants for the coming of their Lord. The diligence of servants is prompted, not by fear, but love: and they feel assured of the approbation of their Master, when he shall find every thing done, though not with absolute perfection, yet in all material points agreeably to his will. Thus we would have you with your loins continually girt, and your lamps burning with undiminished splendor[d]. But perhaps we may give a yet juster view of the state to which we would wish to bring you, if we compare you to "a bride preparing herself" for the arrival of her Bridegroom. Such should be the holy, longing, desire which you should feel after the coming of your Lord[e]: and to assist you in this preparation, that eventually we may present you to him in a state of complete readiness, is the blessed service which we have to perform[f].]

Such is the office of those to whom the cure of souls is assigned: and corresponding with it is,

II. The duty of those to whom we minister—

As we must not seek to please men, but to edify them, so they must not be satisfied with reaping mere instruction, but must determine,

1. To yield themselves up to the full influence of our labours—

[In coming to the House of God, all persons should resemble Cornelius and his friends, when Peter came to minister unto them: "Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God[g]." There should be no disposition to cavil at what they hear, or to sit in judgment on the preacher, but a real desire to learn the will of God, and a full determination through grace to do it. If the Minister endeavour to probe the conscience, they should welcome the salutary wound, and cry unto the Lord, "Search me, O God, and try the ground of my heart!" If he be endeavouring rather to bind up the broken spirit, they should thankfully embrace the gracious promises of the Gospel, as those who most need the blessings which it offers. If, on the other hand, he be denouncing the terrors of the Lord, they should humble themselves before God in dust and ashes, if peradventure they may be lifted up in due time. And lastly, if he be expatiating on any duty, they should set themselves, like racers in a course, to run with ardour and with patience the race that is set before them. Whoever it be that speaks, and whatever it be that is spoken, provided only it be agreeable to the standard of truth, they should receive it, as the Thessalonians

[d] Luke xii. 35—38. [e] 2 Pet. iii. 12. with Tit. ii. 13.
[f] Rev. xix. 7. 2 Cor. xi. 2.
[g] Acts x. 33.

lonians did, "not as the word of man, but as the word of God[h]." The whole assembly of you should come to the ordinances as to a banquet prepared of the Lord; or as the sick and diseased came to our Lord in the days of his flesh, each feeling his own malady, and determined, if possible, to obtain a cure: however difficult it may be to gain access to him, you should press through the crowd, as it were, to touch but the hem of his garment; or seek to be let through the tiling of the house, so that you may by any means find admittance into his presence, and obtain the blessings which you stand in need of. In a word, Christians should be satisfied with nothing short of a perfect conformity to the Divine will; and should come to the House of God with hearts so melted, as easily to be poured into the mould of the Gospel, and permanently to retain the very image of their God.]

2. To display the efficacy of them in the sight of all men—

[The Thessalonians were "ensamples," not to the world only, but to Believers also, and *that* throughout all the regions of Macedonia and Achaia. This is what we also should endeavour to be: we should "shine as lights in the world," and *in every situation and relation of life* we should so make our light to shine before men, that all who see us may glorify our Father which is in heaven. We should bear in mind, that the honour of God is greatly affected by our conduct; and that our fellow-creatures also may either be "won by our good conversation," or be eternally ruined by our misconduct. We should, from these considerations, take especial care never to lay a stumbling-block in the way of others; but so to walk, that we may be able to say unto all around us, "Whatsoever ye have seen and heard in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you." Thus we should "shew to all what manner of entrance the Gospel has had amongst us," and what are its genuine effects: and thus putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men, we should constrain them to acknowledge, that the doctrines we profess are holy, and "that God is with us of a truth."]

We conclude with one or two INQUIRIES:

1. What entrance has the Gospel had amongst us?

[Has it so wrought, as to attract the attention, yea, and excite the admiration also, of all around us? Alas! in how many has it produced no change at all! and in how many a change in profession only, or in external conduct, whilst the heart is as worldly, and the temper as unsubdued, as ever! ——— Look to it, Brethren, that ye do not thus receive the grace of God in vain: for if the Gospel be not unto you a savour

[h] 1 Thess. ii. 13.

savour of life unto life, it will be a savour of death, to your more aggravated condemnation.]

2. How may it be rendered more effectual for our good?

[Search what it is that has hitherto obstructed the operation of the word upon your souls. Some are careless and inattentive, so that the word never enters into their hearts; in others, the word takes not any deep root; whilst in others its growth is hindered by the lusts and cares which grow up together with it. All these therefore must be rooted out, that the good seed may prosper and increase. But there is yet another evil, which renders the most faithful Ministry unavailing for the good of many: I refer to that pride and conceit which so inflate the hearts of many, and render the Gospel itself odious in the world. This must be mortified; and a childlike spirit be cultivated in the midst of us. "The meek will God guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way."]

MLXI.

THE MINISTERIAL CHARACTER PORTRAYED.

1 Thess. ii. 7, 8. *We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.*

BOASTING, when it proceeds from vanity, is hateful in the extreme. But there are occasions whereon it may be necessary to declare what the Lord has done for us, or what we have been enabled to do for him. When, for instance, we are suffering under false accusations, it may be necessary to state many things, which none but God has seen. And we have reason to rejoice that St. Paul's enemies constrained him to have recourse to this method of clearing and vindicating his own character; because by this means we have all his exalted principles clearly developed, and the brightest pattern of human excellence exhibited to our view. But, independent of any such occasions, it is allowable to express the feelings of our hearts, and to bring to the remembrance of those whom we love the opportunities we have had of testifying our regard. It is by such

such communications that we revive both in ourselves and others those sublime affections, which constitute the basis of Christian friendship. The Apostle, when writing to the Corinthians, was constrained to sound forth, as it were, his own praises, in order to answer the calumnies that had been circulated respecting him: but in this epistle he speaks only out of the fulness of his heart to those whom he regarded with the most endeared affection: and the whole of what might be called boasting was nothing but the effusion of a mind glowing with love, and animated with the noblest sentiments.

From what he says of himself in the words before us, we shall take occasion to shew,

I. What are the dispositions and habits of a faithful Minister—

Ministers are represented in the Scriptures under a great variety of characters. Sometimes they are called Shepherds, whose office is to search out the straying sheep, and bring them to the fold of Christ: and, when once brought thither, to watch over them with all-imaginable care, "strengthening the diseased, healing the sick, binding up the broken, bringing back again any that have been driven away:" and as to the lambs, they are to "carry them in their bosom, and gently to lead those that are with young[a]."

But they are designated by a far more exalted character, even that of a father; which comprehends in it every thing that is tender and endearing[b]. How much of care and responsibility is involved in this relation, may be judged from the complaint which Moses poured out before God, when he was called upon to stand, as it were, in this relation to all the people of Israel[c].

There is however a still more tender image by which God is pleased to represent his own stupendous love to his people, and by which also the duty of Ministers is portrayed; I mean that of a mother, nursing her infant offspring[d]. St. Paul, declaring his anxiety for the welfare

[a] Ezek. xxxiv. 2, 4. & Isai. xl. 11.
[b] 1 Cor. iv, 14, 15.
[c] Numb. xi. 11—14.
[d] Isai. lxvi. 10—13.

welfare of his converts, compares his feelings with the pangs of a woman in child-birth[e]; and his delight in them, with that of a mother cherishing in her bosom her new-born infant. The language in our text is exquisitely beautiful and touching. The nurse spoken of, is not an alien, but a nursing-mother: it is not in her arms only, but in her bosom, that she cherishes the child. In all her treatment of it, she is not harsh, as one that is soon wearied in performing offices of love; but gentle. If absent from her infant for a few hours only, she is most affectionately desirous of it, and delights to draw forth to it the breast, even though it be with great pain and inconvenience to herself; and she would impart to it, as it were, her vital strength, yea, her very soul: and all this she does to it because of the tender affection which she bears towards it. The whole creation does not afford a sublimer image than this; yet this fitly represents the conduct of St. Paul towards the Church of Christ, and, consequently, the conduct of every faithful Minister, in proportion as he resembles St. Paul.

Mark then, under this image, the habits of the faithful Minister;

1. His tender affection—

[St. Paul's concern for his converts was never surpassed by that of any mother for her children. If there was the least reason to fear that any temptation had operated to the injury of their souls, he had no rest in his spirit, till he had ascertained their real state; and, if he received a favourable account of them, then every trial was easy, and every affliction light[f]. Thus it is also with every servant of the Lord Jesus. "If any man care not for his sheep, he is an hireling," and unworthy of the name of a Minister of Christ. The true shepherd will, I had almost said, "lay down his life for the sheep." Well he knows that nothing but the Gospel, faithfully administered, can benefit their souls: and this he is willing to impart to them to the utmost of his power, as the remedy for all their diseases, and as a supply for all their wants: and, according to its efficacy upon their souls, will be his hopes and fears, his joys and sorrows. "He has no greater joy than to see his children walk in truth[g]."]

2. His self-denying exertions—

[St. Paul wrought with his hands by night, to supply his own

[e] Gal. iv. 19. [f] Ch. iii. 5—8. [g] 3 John, ver. 4.

own temporal necessities, whilst he laboured, with incredible exertion, throughout the day, to communicate spiritual benefits to the souls of men. Though he might justly have claimed a maintenance for his body, yet he forbore to do it, that he might have the satisfaction of dispensing freely the blessings which he himself had so freely received[h]. Every Minister indeed is not called to forego in like manner his claims of temporal support; but every Minister should be able to declare to his people, as in the presence of God, "I seek not yours, but you." The only object of a faithful servant of Christ is, to advance the welfare of his people: for this end he will "not count even life itself dear to him," but will "endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory[i]." And if he be really called to sacrifice his life in the sacred cause, he will account it rather a ground for congratulation than any cause of sorrow or condolence[k].]

But, as in every relation of life there are duties belonging to the one side as well as the other, it will be proper for us to consider also,

II. The reciprocal obligations of a faithful people—

A husband and wife, a parent and child, a magistrate and subject, have each their appropriate duties; and so have also a Minister and his people: and as the Minister's duties are fitly represented by those of a mother, so those of the people may justly be considered as analogous to those of an affectionate and obedient child. They owe then,

1. Love to his person—

[In this very epistle, wherein St. Paul testifies such unbounded love to his converts, he tells them what they also ought to feel towards those who ministered unto them: "We beseech you, Brethren, to know them who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake[l]." We speak not here of that partiality, which renders men unwilling to receive the Gospel from any one besides their own favourite Minister;—*that* is a reprehensible attachment, leading to an idolatrous regard to some, and a contemptuous disregard of others: but a grateful sense of the obligations conferred by those who labour in the word and doctrine, ought to be cultivated and expressed by all[m]. Indeed it can scarcely be carried to too great an extent: it should not stop

[h] ver. 9. & 2 Thess iii. 8, 9, with 1 Cor. ix. 12—18. & 2 Cor. xi. 7—12.
[i] Acts xx. 24. & 2 Tim. ii. 10.
[k] Phil. ii. 17, 18.
[l] Ch. v. 12, 13.
[m] 1 Tim. v. 17.

stop short of any sacrifice, not even of the surrender of life itself, if by such means their labours may be preserved for the Church of Christ [n].]

2. Attention to his instructions—

[No one can doubt whether this be the duty of a child towards his parent [o]: and it is equally the duty of a people towards their spiritual parent. A Minister is sent especially from God himself to impart unto them the knowledge of the Gospel. Though he is only an earthen vessel, he has the treasures of Salvation committed to him for the benefit of others; and, as a faithful steward, he is to dispense them to all according to their several necessities. He is to them in the place of God himself. He is to them in God's stead, when he is proclaiming to them, in his name, the word of reconciliation. His word, as far as it agrees with the Inspired Volume, is the word, not of man, but of God: and they who despise it, despise not man, but God [p].]

3. Submission to his authority—

[This in the Church of Rome is carried to an absurd and impious extent: but in the Reformed Churches, and especially in our own, it is almost entirely set aside; and a Minister who claims the measure of authority which God has given him for the edification of his Church, is considered as an usurper. But what would be the consequence, if the parent had no authority in his own family? What but confusion must ensue, if all his children thought themselves at liberty to follow their own inclinations, without any direction or restraint from him? True, a Minister is "not a lord over God's heritage:" his authority relates only to things pertaining to the welfare of his Church; but in these his judgment should be a rule of conduct to those committed to him. This is the command of God himself respecting it: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you [q]."]

4. Co-operation with him in every good work—

[A Minister cannot do every thing. Moses had seventy Elders given to him, as assistants in his great work: and such should our people be in the Church of God. They can aid in instructing the rising generation: they may do incalculable good, in searching out the wants and necessities of the poor, and in administering, not to the temporal benefit only of their neighbours, but also to the benefit of their souls. Women, as well as men, have much in their power: and, without the aid of their people, it is little, comparatively, that any Ministers can effect. The

[n] Rom. xvi. 3, 4. [o] See Deut. xxvii. 16. [p] ver. 13. & Ch. iv. 8.
[q] Heb. xiii. 17.

The Apostles themselves were greatly indebted in this respect to their people; and to this even St. Paul ascribed, in some degree at least, the efficiency of his labours[r]. What if, in a large family, the children cannot supply the place of their father? can they do nothing to second his endeavours, and to promote the welfare of the whole? Thus then should even the weakest amongst our people labour, according to their ability, to promote to the uttermost the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the glory of his great name. The richer part should contribute of their abundance to help forward every pious and benevolent plan; and the poorer afford their aid also in any way that may best comport with their sphere, and be best suited to their several capacities.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. How is such a blessed state of things to be *produced?*

[Let all consider the relation into which they are brought; and above all, let them consider, how the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the success of his Gospel, are involved in *their* conduct. Ministers can never hope to be extensively useful, unless they put away all worldly and selfish interests, and labour to attain all those holy feelings which their station imperiously demands. Nor can any people really adorn their holy profession, unless they also on their part seek to become as little children, and cultivate a humble, loving, and heavenly deportment. Let us then, each in his station, aim at this; and pray earnestly to God for his grace, which alone can qualify us for the discharge of our respective duties.]

2. How is such a blessed state of things to be *revived?*

[It must be expected that where the Gospel has been long preached, Satan will sow tares with the wheat, and that evils of some kind or other will arise. It was so in the Apostolic age, and it will be so in every age. It were unreasonable to expect that it should be otherwise, considering how corrupt the hearts of men are, and how easy it is for any one of a perverse spirit to create dissention. But if what we may call the family union and harmony have been interrupted, every one should exert himself to the uttermost to restore the bonds which have been dissolved. Let all in the first place set themselves to find out what has been the occasion of dissention; and endeavour, if possible, to remove the cause, and especially to subdue and mortify those evil dispositions which have unhappily been exercised. If there be any of a perverse spirit, withdraw from them, that they may be put to shame[s]. If any be conscious that they have done amiss, let them

[r] Rom. xvi. 1, 2, 6, 9, 12

[s] Rom. xvi. 17, 18. & especially 2 Thess. iii. 6, 14, 15.

them repent and humble themselves before God and man[t]. Thus will evil be done away: thus will Satan also, our great adversary, be disappointed: and thus shall we all "grow together an holy Temple in the Lord."]

[t] 2 Cor. vii. 8, 9.

MLXII.

THE DUTY OF THOSE WHO ARE CALLED.

1 Thess. ii. 11, 12. *You know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.*

NEXT to the example of our blessed Lord, there is none so worthy of imitation as that of St. Paul. He appears to have been so entirely cast into the mould of the Gospel, that he was a living image of all that it requires. In the Ministerial office especially he was almost a perfect pattern. His intrepidity, his singleness of heart, his self-denial, his fervent zeal for God, and tender love to man, never were surpassed, nor ever equalled by any human Being. Respecting the purity of his intentions, and the probity of his conduct, he could appeal to all among whom he had laboured, yea to God also: *no less than eight times in eleven verses does he repeat this appeal;* so conscious was he that he had exerted himself to the utmost of his power to promote the welfare of his fellow-creatures, and the glory of his God.

In the appeal before us we may notice,

I. The duty of Christians—

The first great duty of those to whom the Gospel comes, is to believe in Christ[a]. But yet even this is subservient to a higher end, even to the attainment of holiness, and the glorifying of God by a heavenly conversation. The Christian is not to be satisfied with low attainments, but to walk worthy of his God; to walk worthy of him,

1. As his Governor—

[God

[a] 1 John iii. 23. & John vi. 28, 29.

[God has given us a law which is a perfect transcript of his mind and will. This law is to be the rule of our conduct. In obeying it therefore we must not select the easier parts, and overlook the precepts which are more difficult: we must not attempt to reduce the standard to our practice; but rather endeavour to raise our practice to the standard. We should not inquire, How little can I do, and yet escape punishment? but rather, What can I do to please and honour my Divine Master? How shall I commend to others his government? How shall I convince them that his service is perfect freedom. How shall I illustrate his perfections by my own conduct? How shall I make my light so to shine before them, that all who behold it shall be constrained to glorify my God, and to take upon them his light and easy yoke?]

2. As his benefactor—

[God has "called" his people, not by the word only, but also by "the effectual working of his power:" He has called them to be subjects of "his kingdom" on earth, and heirs of "his glory" in heaven[b]. This distinguishing grace calls for every possible expression of love and gratitude. Our one inquiry therefore should be, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me? How shall I walk worthy of such a Benefactor? Shall not my soul overflow with love to him? Shall I not "delight myself in him;" and "present myself a living sacrifice to him;" and strive incessantly to "glorify his name?" Shall I think any thing too much to do or suffer, for his sake? Shall I not seek to be "pure as he is pure," and "perfect as he is perfect?" Surely, "as He who has called me is holy, so should I be holy in all manner of conversation[c]."

This is the Christian's duty; thus to argue, and thus to live.]

In order to enforce this subject yet further, we will consider,

II. The duty of Ministers—

It is through the exertions of Ministers that God carries on his work in the hearts of his people. Ministers are set apart on purpose to teach men their duty, and to urge them to the performance of it. They stand related to their people as a parent to his children: and in the exercise of their high office, they are to address them with parental tenderness, and parental authority.

"Suffer ye then the word of exhortation," while we endeavour to impress upon your minds a due regard for holiness:

[b] Eph ii. 19. 2 Thess. ii. 13. [c] 1 Pet. i. 15.

holiness: and permit me, however unworthy of the sacred office, to address you,

1. In a way of affectionate intreaty—

[" God has called you unto holiness:" and "this also we wish, even your perfection." Consider then, I beseech you, how much is to be attained by your advancement in holiness.

Consider, how it will *contribute to your present happiness.*— Experience must long since have shewn you, that there is no comfort in religion, when we are living at a distance from God, or in the indulgence of any besetting sin. We hope too you have found how "pleasant and peaceful are the ways" of godliness, when we are stedfastly walking in them. Go on, and you will have continually increasing evidence, that "*in* keeping God's commandments there is great reward."

Consider also how your piety will *promote the good of others.*— We speak not of the benefit that will arise to society from the good offices you do them; but of the effects which your good example will produce. If your life be not "such as becometh the Gospel of Christ," the world will despise religion as a worthless unproductive thing: and those who profess godliness will be apt to catch the infection, and to sink into lukewarmness. But if you "walk worthy of your vocation," you will "by your well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men;" you will constrain them to confess, that the principles which operate so powerfully on your souls, must needs be good; and you will perhaps win many, who would never have been won by the word alone[d].

Consider further how it will *advance your eternal happiness.*— What though there be no *merit* in your works, shall they not be rewarded? Shall not every one reap according to what he sows[e]; and that too, not according to the quality only, but the quantity also, of his seed? Yes; "every man shall be rewarded according to his own labour[f];" he shall "reap sparingly or bountifully, according as he sowed[g];" and every talent that is improved shall have a correspondent recompence in the day of judgment[h].

What further inducement can you wish for? Only reflect on these things, and surely I shall not have "exhorted" you in vain.]

2. In a way of authoritative injunction—

[St. Paul, when least disposed to grieve his people, said to them, "As my beloved sons, I warn you[i]." And in the text he tells us, that he "charged" them in a most solemn manner, and *testified*[k] unto them. Behold then, we testify unto you that the holiness which

[d] 1 Pet. iii. 1.
[e] Gal. vi. 7, 8.
[f] 1 Cor. iii. 8.
[g] 2 Cor. ix. 6.
[h] Matt. xxv. 28, 29.
[i] 1 Cor. iv. 14.
[k] μαρτυρούμενοι.

which we inculcate is of prime importance, and indispensable necessity.

Consider that *nothing less than this will prove you to be real Christians.*—If you are "Israelites indeed, you must be without guile." If fire descend from heaven into the bosom to consume your lusts, it will burn till all the fuel be consumed. The contending principles of flesh and Spirit will never cease from their warfare, till the flesh be brought into subjection[l]. "If you are Christ's, you have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts[m]." Deceive not yourselves; for, "whomsoever you obey, his servants you are[n]." If you are born of God, you will not harbour any sin[o], or be satisfied with any attainment[p]; but will seek to be "righteous, even as God is righteous[q]."

Consider that *nothing less will suffice to comfort you in a dying hour.*—When you come to that solemn season, things will appear to you in a different light from what they now do. The truths, which have now gained your assent indeed, but float in your mind as though they were devoid of interest or importance, will then present themselves to your mind as the most awful realities. What will you then think of cold and lifeless services? What bitter regret will seize you, and terrible forebodings too perhaps, when you look back upon a partial obedience, and an hypocritical profession? O that you may not fill your dying pillow with thorns! O that you may serve the Lord in such a manner now, that in that day you may "enjoy the testimony of a good conscience," and "have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of your Lord and Saviour[r]!"

Consider lastly, that *nothing less will avail you at the bar of judgment.* We repeat it, that you will not be saved *for* your works: but we repeat also, that you will be dealt with *according to* your works. It will be to little purpose to have cried 'Lord, Lord,' if you are not found to have done the things which he commanded[s]. God has said, "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully[t];" nor will either our self-commendations, or the applause of others, avail us, if the heart-searching God do not bear witness to our integrity[u].

Behold then, as in the sight of God, we testify these things; and charge you all, that if you would ever behold the face of God in peace, you make it the great object of your life to walk as becometh saints, and to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."]

APPLI-

[l] Gal. v. 17. 1 Cor. ix. 27. [m] Gal. v. 24. [n] Rom. vi. 16.
[o] 1 John iii. 9. [p] Phil. iii. 12—14. [q] 1 John iii. 7.
[r] 2 Pet. i. 10, 11. with Ps. xxxvii. 37.
[s] Matt. vii. 21—23. with Luke vi. 46. [t] Jer. xlviii. 10.
[u] 2 Cor. x. 18.

APPLICATION—

[The Apostle contented not himself with *general* exhortations; but addressed himself to individuals; even, as far as he could, to "*every one*" of his people. Let me then apply my subject more *particularly* to you, dispensing to each his portion in due season.

Are there among you *those who make no profession of religion?*— Think not that you are excused from that strictness which is required of the saints. As the creatures of God, you are bound to obey him; and as "bought with the inestimable price of his Son's blood, you are bound to glorify him with your bodies and your spirits, which are his[x]." Nor should it be any consolation to you that you make no profession of religion; for, if you have not been called to be subjects of God's kingdom, and heirs of his glory, you are vassals of Satan, and partakers of his condemnation.

Are there *any who, by reason of their unsteady walk, are ready to doubt whether they have ever been effectually called?* Let me both "*exhort* and *charge*" them not to leave this matter in suspense; but to obtain of God that "grace that shall be sufficient for them." Let me at the same time suggest some considerations proper to "*comfort*" and support their minds. They would ask perhaps, How shall I gain the object of my wishes? How shall I walk worthy of my God? I answer, "WALK IN CHRIST[y]," in a continual dependence on the merit of his blood, and the assistance of his good Spirit. By his blood ye shall be cleansed from guilt: "by his Spirit ye shall be strengthened in your inner man," and enabled to do whatever He commands[z].

Finally, let *all*, whatever they may have attained, press forward for the prize of their high calling, and endeavour to abound more and more.]

[x] 1 Cor. vi. 20. [y] Col. ii. 6. [z] Phil. iv. 13.

MLXIII.

A DUE RECEPTION OF THE GOSPEL.

1 Thess. ii. 13. *For this cause also thank ye God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*

A PARENT of a numerous family must expect trials of various kinds: yet will He have many consolations to counterbalance them. And so it is also with the faithful Minister. Both from without his Church and

and from within, he will experience much that is painful and afflictive: but, if his afflictions abound, so will his consolations also: if his doubts respecting the state of some of his people renew in him pangs, like those of a woman in travail, the progress and advancement of others will afford him much heartfelt satisfaction. Thus St. Paul found it. The anguish that was occasioned in his bosom by some of his converts, was so keen, that he could scarcely speak of them without weeping: but over others he rejoiced with a very lively and exalted joy. The Church at Thessalonica in particular was contemplated by him with pre-eminent delight; insomuch, that whenever the thought of them occurred to his mind, he could not but pour out his soul before God in praises and thanksgivings in their behalf.

It is our intention at present to shew,

I. What there was in his Ministry among them which occasioned such incessant thankfulness to God—

His success among them was great, not only as to the number of his converts, but especially in the spirit which they manifested. In ministering to them the Gospel, there were two things in particular which filled him with joy and gratitude; namely,

1. The manner of its reception—

[They did not consider his word as a system, like that of different philosophers, invented by man, and standing only on human authority; but they regarded it as the word of God himself, even whilst it was delivered to them by a weak instrument, "a man of like passions with themselves." They looked, through the Messenger, to Him whose Ambassador he was; and every word that was uttered by him was received as if it had been spoken from heaven by the Deity himself; they received it as *proceeding from his love*, as *sanctioned by his authority*, and as *assured to them by his truth and faithfulness*. The great wonders of redemption through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus were not looked upon "as a cunningly-devised fable," but as a most stupendous effort of divine wisdom, planned from all eternity in the councils of the Father, and executed in due season by his only-begotten Son, and applied to their hearts by the agency of the ever blessed Spirit———They felt not themselves at liberty to reject these overtures of mercy, or to cavil at them

as

as exceeding the comprehension of our feeble reason; they considered that they had no alternative, but to believe, and live; or to disbelieve, and perish ——— But their acceptance of these overtures was not a matter of constraint: they saw that the veracity of God was pledged to fulfil every promise which the Apostle made to them in Jehovah's name; and that it was as impossible for a penitent Believer to perish, as it was for God to lie ——— How could he be otherwise than thankful, when his word among them was thus received?]

2. The manner of its operation—

[Truly his word among them was "quick and powerful;" and most effectually did it work upon them in *their first conversion*, in *their subsequent support*, and in *their progressive sanctification*. He speaks before of "the entrance he had had among them," in that "they had turned from idols to serve the living and true God:" and, immediately after our text, he mentions the heavy trials they had had to endure; which yet they had sustained with unshaken fortitude: and the tidings he had heard from Timothy, of their advancement in faith and love and every grace, completed his joy, so that he forgot all his own afflictions through his joy on their account[a]. What could he desire more than this? St. John, who had been admitted to nearer intercourse with his Saviour than any other of the Apostles, knew no greater joy than this[b]. Well therefore might St. Paul pour forth his soul to God in praises and thanksgiving for such a mercy as this.]

In St. Paul's acknowledgments we may see,

II. What grounds of thankfulness all Ministers have, whose labours are so blest—

Wherever the Gospel is so received, and so operates, there is abundant cause for praise and thanksgiving unto God;

1. For the people's sake—

[Happy, thrice "happy are the people that are in such a case, yea happy are the people who have the Lord for their God." "Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord[c]!" "Can we reflect on the change that has taken place on you, and not rejoice? "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are dug." Do ye congratulate Lot on his escape from Sodom? What was that fire in comparison of those burnings from which ye are escaped? He was saved to die at last: you are saved to live for ever. You are not merely delivered from the power of darkness, but are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, yea, and are made heirs together with him

[a] Ch. iii. 6, 7. [b] 3 John ver. 4. [c] Deut. xxxiii. 29.

him of an everlasting inheritance. Little can we know of the value of an immortal soul, if we are not filled with joy and gratitude at the thought of such blessings being imparted to it.]

2. For the Church's sake—

[No language could adequately express the transports of the saints of old, when they contemplated the effects that are here described: "Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel[d]." Where such children are multiplied, Zion, the mother of them all, may well rejoice: her honour will be great; her happiness exalted: with what joy will she draw forth her breasts of consolation to her numerous offspring! with what delight will she dandle them on her knees, and bear them in her arms[e]! In the sight of all the world shall she be glorified; and she shall be a blessing to all around her[f].]

3. For the world's sake—

[The dishonourable conduct of professors is a stumbling-block to the world; as our Lord has said, "Woe unto the world, because of offences." But wherever the sanctifying operations of the Spirit appear, there "the ignorance of foolish men is put to silence;" and they are constrained to acknowledge the excellency of the principles which they hate. Independently of any spiritual benefit, the world are greatly advantaged by the progress and advancement of true religion: for if they will only inquire, Who are the great promoters of every charitable institution, they will find that the most active agents are uniformly found amongst those who love and profess the Gospel. But besides this, their spiritual welfare is greatly advanced by the blameless and heavenly deportment of professing people: their prejudices are weakened, and they are often led to inquire candidly into those principles, which they see to be productive of such blessed effects.]

4. For the Lord's sake—

[It is from the Church alone that God has any glory upon earth. But when his people do indeed adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour, their light constrains many to glorify their heavenly Father. Then too does the Saviour himself rejoice: he "sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied." Yea, God the Father too is comforted, if we may so speak, in the succesful issue of his eternal counsels: "He beholds his obedient people with infinite satisfaction;" "he rejoices over them with joy; he rests in his love; he joys over them with singing[g]." Can we then behold events

[d] Isai. xliv. 23. See also Ps. xcvi. 11—13. & xcviii. 1—9.
[e] Isai. lxvi. 10—13. [f] Isai. lx. 13, 14. [g] Zeph. iii. 17.

events in which God the Father and God the Son take so deep an interest, and not be thankful for them? If we ourselves love God in any measure as we ought, we shall rejoice in his joy, and glory in his glory.]

SEE from hence,

1. Whence it is that the word preached is so generally ineffectual to any saving purpose—

[As in the wilderness, so now, "the word preached does not profit men, because it is not mixed with faith in them that hear it." Men do not hear it as the word of *God*. They see nothing, and hear nothing, but a man like themselves; and therefore they hear without interest and forget without remorse. But be it known to all, that their disregard of God's messages, by whomsoever delivered, involves them in the deepest guilt[h], and will subject them to the heaviest punishment[i].]

2. How it may be made effectual to the good of our souls—

[Whenever you come up to the House of God, come with prepared hearts, as Israel did to Mount Sinai at the giving of the law. Look through the Minister to God himself. Sit at his feet, as Mary at the feet of Jesus. Seek not to be *pleased*, but *edified*. Do not indulge a critical and captious spirit; but "receive with meekness the engrafted word;" and then you shall find it both able and effectual to save your souls[k]. If it be a precept or an exhortation, a promise or a threatening, receive it as if it were addressed to you by an audible voice from heaven: so shall it descend on your souls as dew or rain, that fail not to accomplish the ends for which they are sent[l].]

[h] 2 Chron. xxxvi. 12. 1 Thess. iv. 8.
[i] Heb. ii. 1—3. & x. 28, 29.
[k] Jam. i. 21.
[l] Isai. lv. 10, 11.

MLXIV.

CHRISTIANS THE JOY OF THEIR MINISTERS.

1 Thess. ii. 19, 20. *What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.*

THE relation between a Minister and his people is a subject rarely touched upon, except in addresses exclusively intended for those who sustain the pastoral office. But it is a subject of general importance; and ought to be felt by the people, as well as by the Minister;

Minister; between whom there should be at all times a feeling of reciprocal affection. A pious Pastor does not undertake his office in order to feed himself with the fat, and clothe himself with the wool, of his flock. No; he has higher objects in view: he seeks their best interests, and makes their welfare his chief concern. The Epistles of St. Paul, not those addressed to Timothy and Titus merely, but those addressed to whole Churches, are full of this subject. This to the Thessalonians is almost one continued breathing of parental tenderness on the Apostle's part, and a call on his converts for correspondent emotions on their part. The extreme ardor of his affection for them is indeed the immediate subject of all the preceding context. He had been driven from them suddenly by a violent persecution; and it was owing to the unabated malice of his enemies that he had not visited them again. Greatly had he longed to do so; and repeated efforts had he made; for they were exceeding dear to him, as he tells them: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? Yes, ye are our glory and joy."

From these words we will take occasion to shew,

I. In what light a faithful Minister views his people—

If a man be a faithful servant of Christ, the prosperity of his people will be the one aim of all his labours, and the one source of all his joys: both at the present hour, and in the prospect of the eternal world, their welfare will be "his hope, his joy, his crown of rejoicing." Do we inquire, Wherefore they are so dear to him? we answer, He glories in them;

1. As witnesses for God—

[God is excluded as it were from this lower world. The great mass of mankind acknowledge him not, or acknowledge him in word only, and not in deed and in truth. But true Believers confess him openly before men: they are his witnesses, that he is great, and worthy to be feared; that he is good, and worthy to be loved; that he is faithful, and worthy of entire trust and confidence. But yet more particularly they are witnesses of all his perfections, as united and glorified in the cross of Christ; and

and they proclaim to all around them, that, in Christ Jesus, God is "a just God and a Saviour," yea "just, and yet the justifier of all that believe in Jesus." These are the truths which Ministers have it in commission to make known to the sons of men: and by the free publication of these truths they hope to turn men from the guilt and dominion of sin, to peace with God, and universal holiness. Obstinate Unbelievers will deride this attempt as visionary: but the Minister of God can point to his converts as living witnesses for God, and as monuments of the saving efficacy of his Gospel; and in this view they give him a ground of joy and exultation far beyond all that the whole world besides could afford. Hence "he glories in them in the Churches," as God himself also does, seeing that "they are to him for a name and for a praise and for a glory" throughout the whole earth.]

2. As trophies of the Redeemer's grace—

[There is not one of them who was not once a bond-slave of Satan, "the god of this world, who ruleth in all the children of disobedience." But secure as they once seemed to be in the hands of "the strong man armed, the stronger Potentate, even Jesus, has rescued them" from his dominion, and "brought them into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Jesus, when he yet hanged upon the cross, triumphed over the principalities and powers of hell, and "by death overcame him that had the power of death;" but in his resurrection and ascension he triumphed yet more, "leading captivity itself captive." But it is in the preaching of his word that all this is made to appear. By that men are "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Not that he drags them like captives at his chariot-wheels, but rather takes them up with him into "his chariot, wherein he goes forth conquering and to conquer." How Jesus exults in them in this view may be judged from that expression of the Prophet; "Ye are a crown of glory and a royal diadem in the hands of your God[a]." No wonder therefore that the soldiers of Christ, through whose instrumentality the victory has been won, exult also.]

3. As the fruits of his own labour—

[It is rarely, if ever, now, that faithful servants of Christ are suffered to labour, like Isaiah, fifty years, and, like Hosea, seventy, with scarcely any visible fruits of their Ministry. Though God does not make equal use of all, yet, if they be faithful, he he will not leave them without witness[b]: he will "accompany their word with signs following." Were they left to "labour in vain and run in vain," their hands would soon hang down, and their hearts faint: but when they see "the dry bones quickened, and the dead come forth out of their graves," through the influence

[a] Isai. lxii. 3. [b] Jer. xxiii. 22.

influence of their word, they greatly rejoice[c]. They point to such persons as "seals of their Ministry[d]," and as attestations from God, that the word delivered by them is His word. It is said of women, that, when once they behold the fruit of their travail, they "forget, as it were, all their pangs, for joy that a man-child is born into the world." And thus it certainly is with those who minister in holy things. Much they have to endure in the prosecution of their great object: but when they see sons and daughters born to God, they account their labours richly recompensed; and, for the attainment of such a blessing "they count not even their lives dear unto them."

4. As pledges of his own eternal felicity—

[There is, it is true, no merit in converting sinners unto God, seeing that the whole work is God's alone. "Whoever plant or water, it is God alone who gives the increase." But it is nevertheless true, that "they who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever[e]." It is not indeed in proportion to every man's *success*, that a recompence will be bestowed; but according to every man's *labour* it will[f]. And oh! what a blessed period will that be, when the faithful Minister shall present his converts before the throne of God, saying, "Here am I, and the children thou hast given me!" Not even in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ himself will he forget those with whom, as St. Paul expresses it, he once travailed in birth: "there will they be his joy and crown of rejoicing:" there will they be, as it were, jewels in his crown. Every fresh accession to the Church thus enhances the Minister's joy: and in the prospect of this, "he joys according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil[g]."]

But since it is not over *all* that a Minister can rejoice, we proceed to shew,

II. Who they are whom he can truly recognize under this character—

In the first ages, when every one was exposed to so much peril on account of his Christian profession, there was reason to hope that all were sincere: and therefore the Apostle could say to the whole Philippian Church, "It is meet for me to think thus of you all." But Christianity is professed now under far other circumstances: and the great mass of those who are called by the name of Christ are far from being "a joy and crown of rejoicing" to their Minister. Even

[c] Ezek. xxxvii. 9, 10. [d] 1 Cor. ix. 2. [e] Dan. xii. 3.
[f] 1 Cor. iv. 8. [g] Isai. ix. 3.

Even of religious professors, there are great multitudes "of whom we must stand in doubt," and of whom we cannot speak, but with grief[h]. Those who alone will ultimately prove the joy and crown of their Ministers, are,

1. Those who embrace the faith—

[There must be a real conversion of the soul to God. It is not necessary that this conversion be sudden, or that it should be attended with such circumstances as shall enable a person to declare the precise time and manner in which it was accomplished: but it is necessary that every man should have an evidence within himself that he is "translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son." He must receive Christ into his heart, and build on him as the only foundation of his hope. "Christ must become truly precious to his soul." Christ must be his life, his peace, his strength, his joy, his All. Till this be done, a Minister can have no comfort in any man, because he has no ground to believe him truly and savingly converted to God: but when this change is manifest, (for no natural man in the universe ever thus gloried in Christ alone,) then does the person in whom it is wrought become the joy and crown of his Minister: he then, in the judgment of charity, is brought to the fold of Christ: and his Minister, like a faithful shepherd, rejoices over him, as a sheep that was lost, and is found.]

2. Those who walk in love—

[If there be a mere adoption of Christian *principles*, without the attainment of Christian *practice*, this change will produce no satisfaction in the heart either of God or man. But if there be a corresponding change in the heart and life of a professor, and a suitable exercise of Christian graces and tempers, then the Minister will feel a proportionable confidence respecting a work of grace within him: seeing the fruit to be good, he will conclude that the tree is good also. The grace of love in particular must be predominant. "This is the grace whereby all men are to know whether we be Christ's disciples." If pride, envy, malice, or any other temper contrary to love, reign in the heart, we only deceive ourselves in fancying ourselves Christians: we are yet in darkness, and children of the wicked one[i]. A Minister can only weep over such persons: they are a grief to him here[k]: they will be yet more so in that day when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come to judge the world[l]: they themselves too, if they be not undeceived in time, will have to bewail their delusions to all eternity. Love is absolutely and indispensably necessary to prove the

[h] Phil. iii. 18.
[i] 1 John ii. 9—11. & iii. 10, 14, 15. & iv. 7, 8.
[k] 2 Cor. xii. 20, 21. [l] Heb. xiii. 17.

the sincerity of our faith. If that reign not in the heart, our faith is but the faith of devils: but if that be the governing principle of our lives, then have we "that which accompanies salvation;" and a Minister may confidently rejoice over us as the elect of God[m].]

3. Those who advance in holiness—

[It is essential to grace, that it grows and advances in the soul. The children of God's family are all expected to grow from "babes" to "young men," and from young men to "fathers." Now, as a mother, however she might rejoice at the birth of her infant, would soon cease to rejoice, if it did not grow in stature and in strength; so is a Minister's joy turned into grief, if he see his people making no proficiency in the divine life, but continuing under the habitual influence of those defects which characterized them in their unconverted state, or in the earlier stages of their professed conversion. O ye who profess godliness, consider this; and inquire whether you do indeed make your profiting to appear? It is only when we have clear evidence that you are growing up into Christ as your living Head, and progressively transformed into his image, that we can glory in you, or look forward with comfort to that awful meeting which we shall have with you in the great day of the Lord Jesus[n].]

We will IMPROVE this subject,

1. In a way of appeal—

[The text is an appeal to the whole Church at Thessalonica, that he had sought nothing, and gloried in nothing, in comparison of their spiritual welfare. And the same appeal, we hope through grace, we can make also[o]. Yes, blessed be God, we can, and do, appeal both to you and to God himself, that we have lived but for the benefit of those committed to our charge, and "have known no greater joy than to see our people walk in truth." Permit us then to ask, Whether ye can make the same appeal to the heart-searching God? Have ye sought, as the one great object of your life, so to improve our Ministrations, that "ye might be our joy and crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" Has there also been a reciprocity of affection, so that "we have been your rejoicing, even as ye also have been ours, in the prospect of the great day of the Lord Jesus[p]?" Let this be well fixed in all your minds, that unless the regard between a Minister and his people be mutual, and their endeavours to reap benefits from his Ministry

[m] 1 Thess. i. 4. Heb. vi. 9. [n] 1 John ii. 28.

[o] Of course, no Minister will proceed to make such an appeal, if he has not a testimony in the consciences of his people, that what he says is true. [p] 2 Cor. i. 14.

Ministry keep pace with his efforts to impart them, little ultimate good can result from the connexion: on the contrary, the word which he labours to make unto you "a savour of life unto life, will prove in the issue a savour of death unto death."]

2. In a way of exhortation—

[A meeting must soon take place between us before the judgment-seat of Christ: and in reference to that awful period St. Paul exhorted the Thessalonian Church, saying, "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by *our gathering together unto him*[q]." In reference to that solemn meeting we also would exhort you. In a little time we shall be called to give an account of our ministrations, as you also will of your improvement of them. Let not him who wishes you to be his joy and crown be disappointed of his hope. If he have not to "present you in a perfect state to Christ in that day," all his warnings and instructions will have been lost upon you[r], yea, worse than lost, seeing that he will be "a swift witness against you."

O ye, who have never yet been converted by the labours of your Minister, let him now prevail on you to turn unto the Lord with your whole hearts———

And let those of you who look up to him as your Spiritual Father, hold fast the truth ye have received, and endeavour to shine more and more as lights in the world, that his joy in you may be complete in the last day[s]. Yes, we would address you in the words of Paul to his Philippian converts; "My brethren, dearly beloved, and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand ye fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved[t]."]

[q] 2 Thess. ii. 1.
[r] Col. i. 28.
[s] Phil. ii. 15, 16.
[t] Phil. iv. 1.

MLXV.

THE PEOPLE'S STABILITY IS THE MINISTER'S COMFORT.

1 Thess. iii. 8. *Now I live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.*

THERE is nothing that more strongly characterizes a faithful Ministry, than the mutual affection that is found to exist between the Minister and his stated hearers. The people, while they retain any just regard for their Lord and Saviour, will love those who have been his instruments for good to their souls[a]: and those who are instrumental in bringing others to the knowledge

[a] Gal. iv. 15.

knowledge of salvation, will consider their converts as their children, "whom they have begotten to God," and "with whom they have travailed in birth[b]." We see this exemplified in all St. Paul's epistles, especially in that before us. After a short stay at Thessalonica, he was driven from thence by "certain lewd fellows of the baser sort," who sought to kill him; and who, on hearing that he was fled to Berea, followed him thither with the same intent, and drove him thence also. He was now at a great distance from them, and very apprehensive on their account; lest the sufferings which he had endured for them, and the trials which they themselves also endured, should have deterred them from maintaining their stedfastness in the faith. "When therefore he could no longer forbear[c]," he thought it better to be left at Athens alone, than to remain any longer in uncertainty about them; and accordingly he sent his only friend and companion, Timothy, to see them, and to report to him their state. Having heard a good account of them, he declares, that all sense of his own personal afflictions vanished, as soon as he heard of their spiritual advancement; and that his spirits, which had been exhausted by a long and painful suspense, were revived, so that he began, as it were, to "live" anew, since he was informed that they "stood fast in Christ."

From the words before us we shall take occasion to shew,

I. What is that stability which all Christians must attain—

When any persons first receive the Gospel, so as to yield themselves up to its influence, they are said to "be in Christ:" when they make advances in grace, they are said to "walk in Christ:" and when they are established in a firm adherence to the truth, they are said, as in the text, "to stand fast in the Lord." This is that stability which is required of us; namely, a stability in *the faith*, *the profession*, and *the practice* of the Gospel.

1. In

[b] 1 Cor. iv. 15. Gal. iv. 19. [c] Twice mentioned, ver. 1, 5.

1. In the faith of the Gospel—

[There are many things which may occasion us to make shipwreck of the faith[d] — — — and many more, which may rob us of the vital experience of it in our souls[e] — — — But all these must be withstood: we must "hold fast the form of sound words that hath been delivered to us;" and, not contented with a barren orthodoxy, we must live altogether by faith in the Son of God, enjoying his presence, and "receiving out of his fulness grace for grace" — — —]

2. In the profession of it—

[When persecution arises because of the word, a separation is made between the professors of religion, as the corn and chaff are separated when tossed to and fro in the sieve. But woe be to us, if we be like the chaff, that is driven away with the wind. We must "not put our light under a bushel," but be bold, and "quit ourselves like men:" we must "endure hardships, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ:" we must "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering:" we must be "willing to be bound, or even to die, for the name of the Lord Jesus:" we must not count our lives dear to us, so that we may but finish our course with joy. It is true, we are not to court persecution by an indiscreet declaration of truths, which people are not yet prepared to receive: but we must not conceal our religion, as if we were ashamed of it: we must in no respect deny Christ: "if we draw back, it will be unto perdition:" "if we only look back, after having put our hands to the plough, we are not fit for the kingdom of God:" "he that loveth his life, shall lose it; and he only that is willing to lose his life for Christ's sake, shall save it unto life eternal."]

3. In the practice of it—

[In times like ours, it is easy to retain orthodox opinions, and to keep up a profession of religion: but many are found enlisted under the banners of Christ, who are not really "fighting the good fight of faith." Even in matters of plain truth and honesty, it is not every professor that can bear a scrutiny into his conduct: yea, there really is often found a higher sense of honour and integrity amongst the men of this world, than amongst some, of whom better things might have been hoped. In respect of tempers too, there are many who will talk of Christ, and shew a love to his Gospel, who are yet proud, haughty, imperious, passionate, contentious; many who are so fretful and impatient on every

[d] A conceit of our own wisdom (Rom. i. 22. Isai. xlvii. 10.); a fondness for philosophy and vain deceit (Col. ii. 8.); a listening to the disputes of heretics (2 Tim. ii. 16—18.); an undue regard to ceremonial institutions (Col. ii. 16—19.); or an erroneous idea of the merit of good works (Rom. x. 3.).

[e] Love of the world; sloth, &c. &c.

every trifling occasion, as to make all around them uncomfortable; many too, who, when they ought rather to be judging themselves, are constantly judging others with uncharitable severity. But let not those who possess so little of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, imagine that they are standing fast in the Lord: for, whatever experience they may have had in times past, they are certainly in a state of awful departure from him. We must possess the image of Christ, and we must advance in the attainment of it, or else our faith and our profession will be vain[f].

But if there be no particular deviation from the path of duty in these things, yet may we have greatly declined from true religion. We must preserve a spirituality of mind, a zeal for God, a love to his ways, a delight in secret communion with God, and a tender regard for the temporal and eternal welfare of our fellow-creatures. This is the stability which chiefly characterizes the growing Christian, and which is the surest evidence of an interest in Christ.]

That all may be stirred up to seek this stability, we shall shew,

II. Why their attainment of it lies so near to the heart of every faithful Minister—

A Minister stands related to his people as a pastor to his flock, over which he is to watch, and of which he must give a just account: and his solicitude about them, instead of terminating when they are brought into the fold, may be said then more properly to commence. He will be anxious about their attainment of stability in the Divine life,

1. Because the honour of God is deeply interested in it—

[Let any professor of religion either renounce his profession, or dishonour it by any misconduct, and the world will immediately cry out against religion, and represent all the professors of it as hypocrites. Thus it was that "the name of God was blasphemed" on account of David's fall; and thus "the way of truth is evil spoken of" at this time; as though religion were only a cloke for wickedness. On the other hand, the name of God is glorified, when his people adorn their holy profession: the light which they reflect around them, compels many to acknowledge the beneficial influence of his Gospel, and the powerful efficacy of his grace[ff].

And can Ministers be indifferent about the honour of their Divine Master? If they are so dear to him, that "whoso toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye," ought not He, and His interests,

[f] Jam. i. 26. [ff] Matt. v. 16.

terests, to be dear in their sight? Ought not rivers of tears to run down their eyes, when men keep not his law, and especially when his sacred name is blasphemed through those who bear his name and profess his religion? Yes; much as they must feel when an injury is done to themselves, their grief is incomparably more poignant, when they see their blessed "Lord crucified afresh, and despite done to the Spirit of Grace."]

2. Because their salvation altogether depends upon it—

[It is not sufficient that men "run well for a season;" they must "endure to the end, if ever they would be saved." To what purpose are we *in* Christ, if we do not *stand fast* in him? Our departure from him only makes "our last end worse than our beginning." And is not this a fearful consideration to all who have not one spark of love in their hearts to their fellow-creatures? When St. Paul saw reason to stand in doubt respecting his Galatian converts, "he travailed in birth with them, as it were, a second time, till he should have clear evidence that Christ was truly formed in them." And whoever reflects upon the value of a soul, (in comparison of which the whole world is lighter than the mere dust of a balance,) must have continual sorrow and heaviness in his spirit, when he sees any moved away from the hope of the Gospel, and "forsaking the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns that can hold no water."]

3. Because the great ends of the Ministry are answered by it—

[When any persons turn, either in faith or practice, from the holy commandment delivered to them, "all the labour we have bestowed upon them is in vain:" it is even worse than in vain, because it will bring upon them a more aggravated condemnation. What a reflection is this for those who have spent their strength, and perhaps jeoparded their very lives for the salvation of their fellow-creatures! Can we wonder that the declension of those who have professed our holy religion, should be as a dagger in the hearts of those who have watched and laboured for their souls; and that the lives of faithful Ministers should be bound up, as it were, in the stability of their people? The beloved Disciple could say, "he had no greater joy than that his children walked in truth:" and, no doubt, his greatest grief was, as that of every faithful Minister must be, to see any of them departing from it.]

We shall CONCLUDE our subject with a few words,

1. Of grateful acknowledgment—

[It would not always be proper to commend people to their face; yet on some occasions the Apostle judged it expedient to do

so[g]. We rejoice therefore in bearing testimony to the stedfastness which you have maintained during our afflictive separation from you; and we can truly say with the Apostle, that "in all our affliction we have been greatly comforted by your faith[h]." "We thank God for all the joy wherewith we joy before him on your account;" and we pray, that "what he has thus begun in you, he may perfect until the day of Christ."]

2. Of affectionate warning—

[Never let it be forgotten, that we must first *be* in Christ, before we can *stand fast* in him. If apostates are in an awful condition, so also are they who have never embraced the Gospel of Christ. We must flee to Christ, as our only refuge from the wrath of God; and must seek to be found *in him*, not having our own righteousness, but that which is of God through faith in him.

Let the saints too remember (what the text strongly intimates), that they are in continual danger of falling. They have a subtle enemy, whose devices have ruined thousands, even of those who once appeared eminently holy. "Let him therefore that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."]

3. Of joyful encouragement—

[It is not *in yourselves*, but in *the Lord*, that you are to stand fast: and while you are placing all your dependence on him, he is engaged to "keep you by his own almighty power unto everlasting salvation." "Be strong then in the Lord, and in the power of *his* might." "His grace is sufficient for you," and shall "make you more than conquerors" over all your enemies. Weak as you are in yourselves, "He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." "As then ye have received the Lord Jesus Christ, so walk ye in him, &c.[i]"]

[g] 1 Thess. i. 2, 3. & 2 Thess. i. 3, 4.

[h] Verse before the text. This was after almost a whole year's intermission of the author's labours.

[i] Col. ii. 6, 7.

MLXVI.

THE EFFECT OF LOVE ON UNIVERSAL HOLINESS.

1 Thess. iii. 12, 13. *The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you; to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.*

THE

THE grace which is most generally spoken of in the holy Scriptures as establishing the souls of men, is faith: "If ye believe not," says the prophet, "ye shall not be established[a]:" and again, "Believe in the Lord your God, and so shall ye be established[b]." It is by faith that we lay hold on the word of God; and by faith that we commit our every concern to God; and by faith that we expect the accomplishment of all that God has promised: and therefore the composing and establishing of our minds in relation to all future events is properly represented as the fruit of faith. But there is a sense in which love also establishes the heart, as the Apostle intimates in the passage before us; where he prays, that God would make the Thessalonian Christians to abound in love, *in order to* the establishment of their hearts in universal holiness. In this view love is sometimes united with faith, as concurring with it to strengthen and fortify the soul; as when Christians are said to "have on the breastplate of faith and love."

But this effect of love not being generally understood, we will enter the more carefully into the subject, and point out,

I. The influence of love on universal holiness—

Love is an extremely powerful principle in the heart of every one that is truly born of God: it is the great wheel which sets the whole machine in motion, and gives a vital energy to every part. In that chiefly does the new man consist; and from it does every Christian grace derive its strength.

1. It rectifies all the powers of the soul—

[Self has usurped an entire dominion over the whole race of mankind. It has pervaded and debased all their faculties. The understanding is so blinded by it, as to be incapable of seeing any thing in its true light: and the judgment is so perverted, that men universally "call evil good, and good evil; they put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter[c]." The will is altogether indisposed for exertion, except in that line where self may be gratified, and our own ease, or pleasure, or interest, or honour may be advanced. Even

[a] Isai. vii. 9. [b] 2 Chron. xx. 20. [c] Isai. v. 20.

Even conscience itself is an unfaithful guide, having no sensibility at all, except in concurrence with the corrupt dictates of a perverted judgment and a carnal will.

But let love come into the heart, and assume that ascendency over it which God has ordained, and all these faculties will receive a new direction,—I had almost said, a new power. Now as soon as truth is proposed to the mind, its beauty and excellence shall be discerned, and its superiority to every adverse principle shall be acknowledged. Now also, notwithstanding the yet remaining bias of the corrupt nature towards what is evil, the prevailing and dominant inclination will be towards what is good; the Divine nature within us counteracting the motions of the old man, and not suffering it any longer to retain the mastery over us; and the conscience continually impelling us to greater measures of conformity to God's revealed will.

This process will be best seen by some examples placed before our eyes. The apostle Paul, previous to his conversion, had all the advantages which a man could have for the improvement and direction of all his faculties: but yet every faculty of his soul was entirely engaged on the side of sin. Not having *love* in his heart, notwithstanding his fancied rectitude, he was no better than a savage beast in his conduct towards the Christian Church: "he breathed out nothing but threatenings and slaughter against them," and thought all the while that he was acting in the path of duty, and rendering to God an acceptable service[d]. But when once he was converted to God, and brought under the influence of a principle of love, he condemned all which he had before approved[e]; and was willing to die for those, whom he had just before laboured to destroy. We may behold the same effect in those who were converted on the day of Pentecost. Compare the state of their minds when they came together that morning, and when they separated, and our subject will have all the elucidation that can possibly be desired[f].]

2. It enters into every action of the life—

[It is as the soul, which pervades, and operates in, every part of the body. We are apt to view it only in some particular *act*; but it enters into, and forms, the very *habit* of the soul. St. Paul's description of it will serve us as a rule whereby to judge of its office, and as a clue whereby to discover its most hidden operations. "Love (or 'charity,' as it is called,) suffereth long, and is kind; it envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things[g]." Here we see, that not only

[d] Acts xxvi. 9, 10.
[e] 1 Tim. i. 13.
[f] Compare Acts ii. 13. with ib. v. 44, 45.
[g] 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.

only our actions towards others, but the dispositions of our own minds in secret, are most materially affected by it; and consequently, that its influence extends to every branch of universal holiness[h].]

3. It prepares the soul for heavenly communications—

[Dispositions that are contrary to love, bar the soul against God: they shut out good, from whatsoever quarter it might come. If a man under their influence read the Bible; what is it but "a sealed book?" if he attempt to pray, the heavens to him are as brass: his prayers have no power to ascend: they have no warmth in them: they freeze upon his very lips[i]. If he enter into conversation, there is no savour in any thing he says, nor any capacity to receive good from any thing he hears. In the public ordinances, and in his private chamber, he is alike dull and formal. Go where he will, or do what he will, he neither communicates good, nor receives good.

But when love comes into his soul, his heart is expanded and enlarged both towards God and man. To God he goes with holy confidence, and finds access even to his very bosom[k]: and "God, who is love" itself, delights in his own image as reflected from the suppliant's face, and rejoices to communicate to him all the blessings of grace and peace. A soul filled with love is just such an habitation as God delights in; and he will not fail to descend and dwell in it[l]. Nor is it in relation to this life only that a person under the influence of love enjoys this confidence; he looks forward, even to the day of judgment, with a sweet assurance, that that God, whose image he so earnestly desires to bear, will not cast him into outer darkness[m]. Let the same person now go into company, or attend the public ordinances, or take up the blessed word of God, he has new eyes, new ears, new feelings altogether. There is an unction of the Spirit upon his soul, that enables him to derive edification from every thing[n], and to diffuse, wherever he goes, "a sweet savour of the knowledge of Christ." His love is like "the ointment of the right-hand which bewrayeth itself," refreshing both himself and all around him

[h] 1 John ii. 10. [i] 1 Pet. iii. 7. [k] 1 John iii. 18, 19.
[l] 1 John iv. 16.

[m] ib. ver. 17. These words in our translation are scarcely intelligible. The sense of them, in the author's apprehension, is, "Herein is our love perfected; *so that we have* boldness in [reference to] the day of judgment; because as he is, so are we in this world, [we bearing His image, who is love itself.]" This makes a clear and important sense of the passage. For such a construction of ἵνα ἴσωμεν, see 1 John i. 9. ἵνα ἀφῇ. See also Mark iv. 12. ἵνα βλέπωσι, compared with Matt. xiii. 13. where the word used is ὅτι. See also how ὅπως ἄν (a yet stronger expression) is used, Rom. iii. 4; and see *a precisely similar construction*, Rev. xiii. 13. ἵνα καὶ πῦρ ποιῇ.

[n] 1 John ii. 20, 27.

him with its sweet odours. In a word, there is no limit to the communications which such an one may expect from "God, who doth already dwell in him, and whose love is, and shall be, perfected within him[o]."]

Seeing then that love is of such fundamental importance, let us notice,

II. The attention due to it under this particular consideration—

Love, for its own sake, should be cultivated to the uttermost: but when we consider its vast influence both on our present and eternal welfare, we should seek it with all our might. This appears from the solicitude which the Apostle expressed for the growth of the Thessalonians in this heavenly virtue. In reference then to his expressions, we say,

1. Let us seek to abound in it—

[Whatever advancement any persons may have made in this virtue, they should still press forward for higher attainments in it, desiring to "increase and abound in it more and more." The Thessalonians were eminently distinguished in this respect, so as not to need from the Apostle any instructions on the subject: yet even them did he exhort to "increase more and more[p]," imitating, and emulating, his love to them[q]. Consider for a moment the Apostle's love to them, the ardor, the tenderness, the efficiency of it: he compares his feelings with those of a father, yea, and of a nursing mother towards her infant offspring. And such was his anxiety about them, that he could scarcely endure his existence, till he was assured of their spiritual welfare; and he was as willing to lay down his life for them, as a mother was to draw forth the breast to her sucking child[r]. Now such is the love that we should all aspire after: for nothing short of this is required of us by Almighty God[s].]

2. Let us intreat God to work it in us—

["Love is of God[t]:" nor can any but God create it in the heart. We may attempt to stir up in others this heavenly flame, but we shall never succeed, till God himself shall send down fire from above, and create the vital spark in the soul. Solomon justly observes, that "if a man would give all the substance of his house for love it would be utterly contemned[u]." We may labour and toil to the uttermost; but our efforts will only be like those of

[o] 1 John iv. 12. [p] Ch. iv. 9, 10. [q] The text.
[r] Ch. ii. 7, 8, 11. & iii. 1, 5, 6, 7. [s] 1 John iii. 16.
[t] 1 John iv. 7. [u] Cant. viii. 7.

of the Disciples, when they strove in vain to row their ship to shore, till Jesus entered into their vessel; and then they were immediately at the land whither they wished to go[x]. In many cases, the "more abundantly we endeavour to testify our love, the less we shall be loved[y];" yea, we shall be only "casting our pearls before swine, that will turn again and rend us[z]." But God can in one moment kindle the sacred flame, even in the soul that has indulged the most inveterate malignity. Behold the jailor: one hour he executed his commission against Paul and Silas with savage and needless cruelty: the next, he washed their stripes with all imaginable tenderness and love[a]. Let us cry then to him for the gracious influences of his Spirit, to create us anew, and to form and fashion us after his blessed image.]

3. Let us be stirred up to this especially from the consideration before us—

[Shortly is the Lord Jesus Christ coming with all his glorified saints to judge the world: and then will an inquiry be instituted, not after this or that particular grace, but after universal holiness. This consideration surely ought to weigh with us, and to make us thoroughly in earnest in the pursuit of love. Many grounds of confidence we may appear to have; but they will all fail us in that awful day: "Our knowledge may be so extensive, as to embrace all the mysteries of religion; our faith so strong, as to remove mountains; our liberality so great, as to give all our goods to feed the poor; and our zeal so ardent, as to give our bodies to be burned;—and yet, for want of a radical principle of love in our souls, it may profit us nothing; and we may be, in God's estimation, no better than sounding brass or tinkling cymbals[b]." Oh! how carefully should we examine ourselves as to the existence of this principle within us, and how ardently should we seek its increase! "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he:" if he be altogether under the influence of love, "he fulfilleth the law;" and is approved of his God: but, if this be not the reigning principle in his soul, whatever he may be, or whatever he may do, "he is in darkness even until now[c]," and will be consigned to everlasting darkness at the last day[d].]

With those who feel the importance of this subject, two QUESTIONS will naturally arise;

1. How shall I know whether my love increases?

[This question deserves an attentive consideration: for, if we form our judgment on inadequate and erroneous grounds, we shall only deceive ourselves to our everlasting destruction. Let not any then imagine that their love increases, because they feel

[x] John vi. 18—21. [y] 2 Cor. xii. 15. [z] Matt. vii. 6.
[a] Acts xvi. 24, 33. [b] 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. [c] 1 John ii. 9, 11.
[d] 1 John iii. 14, 15.

feel an increased attachment to any particular individual or party, or have a general desire to do good. If we would form a correct estimate of our love, we must examine, *what difficulties it surmounts, what sacrifices it makes,* and *what victories it gains* over every selfish inclination or corrupt affection? "If we love those only who love us, what do we more than others? do not even the Pharisees the same?" We must "love them that hate us, and bless them that curse us, and do good to them that despitefully use us and persecute us:" and it is in this way only that we can approve ourselves "children of our heavenly Father." Enter then deeply into the workings of your own hearts: see how far pride, and anger, and malice, and envy are mortified within you; and how far humility, and meekness, and forbearance, and forgiveness, and a disposition to prefer others in honour above yourself, are risen up in their stead, and are brought, though under the most trying circumstances, into easy and habitual exercise. Real love has, if I may so say, an intuitive and instinctive operation. See it in the mother of the child which Solomon ordered to be divided between the claimants: she did not need to reason upon the matter; but love, instantly operating in her soul, inclined her to sacrifice her own interests for the good of her child. So it is that love will evidence itself, wherever it exists: it will rise to the occasion, whatever the occasion be; it will "heap coals of fire on the head" of those whom it cannot otherwise soften; and, "instead of being overcome of evil, it will overcome evil with good." Try yourselves by this standard, and you will soon see what the state of your souls is before God.]

2. What shall I do to get an increase of it?

[Many directions here might be given: but we will content ourselves with only one. Nothing but love will beget love: nor will any thing but a sense of God's love to us prevail to create in us any real love towards our fellow-creatures: we must know what he has done in laying down his life for us, before we can feel any disposition to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if by grace we are enabled to "comprehend in some good measure the height and depth and length and breadth of Christ's love," then shall we be transformed by it into his image, yea, and "be filled with all the fulness of God[e]." Contemplate then this stupendous mystery: dwell upon it, as it were, incessantly in your minds: muse upon it, till the fire of Divine love kindle in your souls: and from thus "beholding his glory, you shall be changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord[f]."]

[e] Eph. iii. 18, 19. [f] 2 Cor. iii. 18.

MLXVII.

ADVANCEMENT IN HOLINESS ENFORCED.

1 Thess. iv. 1. *We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.*

OUR blessed Lord, when about to leave the world, commanded his Apostles to go and "proselyte all nations" to his religion, "teaching them at the same time to observe and do all things that he had commanded them." Thus, in their ministrations, principle and practice were to go hand in hand. But many are disposed to separate what he has thus united; some making the Gospel little else than a system of moral duties; whilst others omit duty altogether, and occupy themselves entirely in establishing their own peculiar views of its doctrines. Both of these parties we conceive to be wrong. A superstructure is nothing without a foundation; neither is a foundation any thing without a superstructure. Each indeed has its appropriate place; but both are alike important: for if, on the one hand, the superstructure will fall, without a foundation; so, on the other hand, it is for the sake of the superstructure alone that the foundation is laid. St. Paul, "as a wise master-builder," was careful at all times to lay his foundation deep and strong: but, having done this, he was careful also to raise upon it a beauteous edifice, such as God himself would delight to inhabit[a]. This appears in all his epistles, not excepting those which are most devoted to the establishment of sound doctrine. In the epistle before us he seems to have had little else in view, than to assure the Thessalonians of his tender regard for them, and to excite them to the highest possible attainments in universal holiness. He was ready enough to acknowledge, that his instructions had produced the most salutary effects upon them; but he was anxious that they should still press forward for higher attainments, as long as any thing should remain to be attained.

The

[a] 1 Cor. iii. 10, 11. Eph. ii. 22.

The words which we have just read consist of an appeal, and an exhortation. Let us consider,

I. The appeal—

St. Paul had not sought to amuse them by curious speculations; nor had he given them maxims whereby they might please and gratify their fellow-creatures. His object had been to bring them to such a holy and consistent "walk," as would be pleasing and acceptable to their God. What kind of a walk that is, it will be profitable for us to inquire.

If we would so walk as to please God, we must,

1. Walk *in* Christ, by a living faith—

[This is particularly required by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Colossians: "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so *walk ye in him*[b]." By this is meant, that we should walk in a continual dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ for all those blessings which we stand in need of. He is the fountain of them all: they are treasured up in him, on purpose that we may have them secured for us against every enemy[c]. Do we need a justifying righteousness? To him we must look for it, and from him we must receive it; "We must call him, The Lord our Righteousness[d]." Do we need grace to sanctify and renew our souls? From him we must receive it, according to our necessities[e]. Our wisdom, our strength, our peace, our all, is in him, and must be derived from him in the exercise of faith and prayer[f]. Thus it was that St. Paul himself walked: "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me[g]." And thus it is that we also must live, depending on him for every thing, and glorying in him alone[h].]

2. Walk *after* Christ, by a holy conversation—

[This also is particularly specified by another Apostle as essential to an acceptable walk with God: "He that abideth in him ought himself also to *walk even as he walked*[i]." Our blessed Lord "has left us an example, that we should follow his steps." Like him, we must live altogether for God, making it "our meat and our drink to do his will." Like him, we must rise superior to all worldly cares, or pleasures, or honours, "not being of the world, even as he was not of the world." Like him, we must exercise meekness and patience, and forbearance, and love even to our bitterest enemies, never swerving in the least from

[b] Col. ii. 6. [c] Col. iii. 3. [d] Jer. xxiii. 6.
[e] John i. 16. [f] 1 Cor. i. 30. [g] Gal. ii. 20.
[h] Isai. xlv. 24, 25. [i] 1 John ii. 6.

from the path of duty for fear of them, nor yielding to any thing of a vindictive spirit on account of them, but rendering to them, under all circumstances, good for evil, and committing ourselves entirely to the disposal of an all-wise God[k]. In a word, "the same mind must be in us as was in him;" under every possible situation and circumstance of life[l]: and then, as "he pleased the Father always," so shall we infallibly be approved by him in the whole of our conversation[m].]

The Apostle, appealing to them that he had so taught them, exhorts them to press forward in the course he had pointed out. Let us proceed then to consider,

II. The exhortation—

In this he acknowledges, that they had already done well: but he wishes them to redouble their exertions in their heavenly way. Let us notice here,

1. The fact conceded—

[When he says, "Ye have received of us," he does not mean merely that they had *heard* his instructions, but that they had so heard them as to be *influenced by* them. It was at all times a delight to the Apostle to acknowledge the good that was in his converts, and to bestow commendation on them as far as it was due. And it is with unfeigned joy, that we can make the same acknowledgment respecting those to whom we have ministered. We bless God that many have been brought to live by faith upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and "so to walk as they have him for an ensample[mm]:" and it is our earnest desire and prayer to God, that our ministrations may produce the same blessed effect on all. But whatever advances you may have made in the divine life, we must call your attention to,]

2. The duty urged—

[Paul would not that any one of his converts should faint or be weary in well-doing. "The path of the just is like that of the sun," which advances without intermission to its meridian height and splendor[n]. Having begun to run well, we must continue; yea, like racers in a course, we must forget that which is behind, and press forward with ever-increasing ardour to that which is before, exerting ourselves the more, the nearer we approach the goal[o]. Behold then our duty: Have we begun to "walk *in* Christ Jesus?" let us live more entirely upon him every day we live.

[k] 1 Pet. ii. 21—23. [l] Phil. ii. 5. [m] Rom. xii. 2.

[mm] Of course, a Congregation should be well known before such concessions are made. They come best from a stated Pastor, who knows their state.

[n] Prov. iv. 18. [o] Phil. iii. 13, 14.

live. Let us resemble the branch of a vine, which incessantly derives its sap and nourishment from the stock, and derives it only in order to its more abundant production of the choicest fruit[p]. Have we begun to "walk *after* Christ?" let us seek a more entire conformity to his image, yea, a perfect transformation into it "from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord[q]." We must know no bounds, no limits to our exertions: we must seek to "grow up into him in all things," to attain "the full measure of his stature[r]," to be "holy as he is holy," and "perfect as he is perfect."]

The affectionate and earnest manner in which the Apostle urges this duty upon them, will furnish us with an important and appropriate CONCLUSION—

He might well have enjoined these things in an authoritative manner; but "for love's sake he rather besought them[s]." But what an argument did he use! "I exhort you by the Lord Jesus!" By this sacred name I would also beseech you, beloved Brethren: I would intreat you,

1. By the consideration *of all that he has done and suffered for you*—

[Can you reflect on the humiliation, the labours, the sufferings to which he submitted for you, and not long to requite him to the utmost of your power? He never assigned any bounds to his love, and will you fix any bounds to yours? He never ceased from his work, till he could say, "It is finished:" and will you stop short in yours? O Brethren, this is our wish, even your perfection[t]." Let the same be your wish, your labour, your continual pursuit.]

2. By the consideration *of all the interest that he yet takes in your welfare*—

[Night and day is he occupied in promoting the salvation of your souls. Though seated on his Father's throne, and partaking of all his Father's glory, he is not forgetful of you. On the contrary, he is making continual intercession for you, and administering the affairs of the whole creation for your good. Does he see you deviating in any respect from the path which he trod? "Father," he cries, "forgive them, and lay not this sin to their charge." Does he see the powers of darkness striving to ensnare you? He sends a host of angels to your aid, that they may "minister unto you," and "hold you up in their hands, that you dash not your foot against a stone."

[p] John xv. 4, 5. [q] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [r] Eph. iv. 13, 15.
[s] Philem. 8, 9. [t] 2 Cor. xiii. 9.

stone." Does he see you ready to faint in your spiritual course? "Go," says he, "go, My Spirit, strengthen the hands, and encourage the heart, of that drooping saint:" "Take of the things that are mine, and shew them unto him:" "glorify me before him:" and "fulfil in him all my good pleasure."

Now then, when the Saviour thus cares for you, will you intermit your care for him? When he is thus managing your concerns, will you not with increasing confidence commit them to his care? When he is doing every thing that can possibly be done for you, will you leave any thing undone that can be done for him?]

3. By the consideration *of the honour he will derive from you*—

[He himself tells us, that "his Father is glorified in our fruitfulness[u]." And St. Paul speaks of Christ also as magnified in his body, whether by life or death[x]. What a thought is this! Can you, my Brethren, glorify the Father, and magnify the Lord Jesus, and will you not strive to do it? Know assuredly, that "your professed subjection to the Gospel of Christ" does cause him to be exceedingly magnified: and the more "the exceeding grace of God" appears in you, the more of praises and adoration and thanksgiving will abound to him[y]. Let this blessed prospect animate your souls: and whereinsoever you have hitherto glorified him, seek to "abound more and more."]

4. By the consideration *of the glory that will accrue to him in the day of judgment*—

[In that great day the Lord Jesus "Christ will be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe[z]." The brighter his image shone upon them here, the more radiance will appear around them there; and all will be as jewels to compose his crown[a]. When the demoniac had confessed his inability to withstand the Lord Jesus, and yet had prevailed over seven men who attempted to cast out the evil spirit, we are told that "the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified[b]." How then will it be magnified, when the extent of his power in you shall be seen, and your once dark polluted souls shall shine forth as the sun in the firmament for ever and ever! Now then is the time for you to exalt his name, and to augment his glory to all eternity. It is but a little time that you will be able to do any thing for him: when death comes, all your opportunities to advance his glory will cease for ever. Up then, and be doing. We have shewn you how to walk and to please God, and you have begun the blessed work: but oh! we intreat you to abound more and more. And may "the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the Lord

[u] John xv. 8. [x] Phil. i. 20. [y] 2 Cor. ix. 13, 14.
[z] 2 Thess. i. 10. [a] Mal. iii. 17. [b] Acts xix. 17.

Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ: to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen[c]."]

[c] Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

MLXVIII.

THE RESURRECTION.

1 Thess. iv. 13—18. *I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope: for, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with him in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

IT is justly said by the Apostle, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come." Certainly true religion doubles our joys, at the same time that it greatly diminishes our sorrows. Whatever temporal happiness a man of God enjoys, he has, by anticipation, the joys of eternity also added to it; whilst his griefs, whatever they may be, are also proportionably mitigated by the consideration of their transitory nature, their sanctifying efficacy, and their glorious issue. This St. Paul intimates in the passage before us. There were some of the Thessalonian Church who had given way to sorrow in an unbecoming manner; so that, in that respect, they could scarcely be discerned as differing from the unconverted Heathen around them. To correct this, he tells them of the glorious prospects which they have in the eternal world, and begs them to look forward to their future destinies, as the means of tranquillizing their minds under

under all the painful circumstances which might at any time occur.

In the words which we have just read, he declares,

I. The certainty of the Resurrection—

The Heathen quite derided the idea of the Resurrection[a], deeming it altogether incredible[b]: and some who professed Christianity explained away the doctrine relating to it, and represented the Resurrection as a merely spiritual change, which had passed already[c]. Even some of the Thessalonian Church did not appear to be well grounded in it: and therefore St. Paul assured them, that it was a doctrine on which they might fully depend.

They did believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—

[On these two facts all Christianity was founded, namely, that "Jesus had died for our sins, and had risen again for our justification[d]." If Jesus had not risen, all their faith in him, and all their hope from him, was altogether vain[e]———]

These facts admitted, the resurrection of man would follow of course—

[The resurrection of our blessed Lord was both *an evidence that God can* raise the dead, and *a pledge that he will*. The same power that could raise him, can raise us: nothing less than omnipotence was necessary for the one; and to omnipotence the other also must yield. Had Jesus risen merely as an individual, we might have supposed it possible that the power exerted in his behalf would not be exercised for us. But he rose as the fœderal Head of his people: and what has been done for him, the Head, shall also be done for all his members. He is "the first-fruits of them that sleep." Now the first-fruits sanctified and assured the whole harvest. We may be sure therefore, that, as "our Forerunner" is gone before, we shall all follow him in due season[f]. The one gives us a full assurance of the other[g].]

For their fuller instruction, he proceeds to state to them,

II. The order in which it shall be effected—

This perhaps is a matter of curiosity, rather than of

[a] Acts xvii. 18, 32. [b] Acts xxvi. 8. [c] 2 Tim. ii. 18.
[d] Rom. iv. 25. [e] 1 Cor. xv. 13—18.
[f] 1 Cor. xv. 20, 23. with John xiv. 2, 3. & Heb. vi 20.
[g] Acts xvii. 31.

of any great practical importance: but Paul would not that the Thessalonian Christians should be ignorant of it; and therefore it is not undeserving of *our* attention. The Resurrection then will take place in this order:

First, the dead will be raised from their graves—

[All that have ever departed out of the world will be restored to life, each clothed in his own proper body. The sea, and the grave will yield up those who have long since been entombed within them, and they shall all live again upon the earth[h]. The text indeed speaks of the righteous only, who had fallen asleep in Christ: but in other passages we are informed that the ungodly also will hear the voice of the Son of God, and, in obedience to it, come forth from their graves[i]. Irresistible will be the summons, when "the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God," shall sound. When Jesus came in his state of humiliation, thousands withstood his voice: but none will, "when he shall come in his own glory, and the glory of his Father, with his holy angels." The great and mighty, as well as the mean and insignificant, shall come forth alike, each re-united to his kindred body, and each appearing in his own proper character.]

Next, those who remain alive upon the earth will be changed—

[Certainly those who are on the earth will not be changed *first*; and it appears, that they will remain unchanged, whilst all who have ever died are restored to life. What a surprising sight will it be, to behold all the children of Adam bursting forth from their graves, and standing up, an innumerable host, in their incorruptible and glorified bodies! ——— But, this once effected, the people who are then living upon earth will be changed in an instant, their mortal and corruptible bodies becoming at once, and without any dissolution preparatory to it, incorruptible and immortal. This is the order which St. Paul has specified also in another epistle: first the trumpet, then the rising of the dead, and then the change of the living[k]. Well may the Apostle call it a "mystery[l]." But as all will then be in that form which they will bear to all eternity, what an amazing difference will then appear in those who once perfectly resembled each other! the godly how beautiful! the ungodly, how deformed! both having either heaven or hell depicted in their very countenances! Amazing sight! how infinitely surpassing all human conception!]

Then will they all together be "caught up to meet the Lord in the air"—

[Yes,

[h] Rev. xx. 13.
[i] John v. 28, 29. Dan. xii. 2.
[k] 1 Cor. xv. 51—53.
[l] Ib.

[Yes, into the presence of their Judge must they go: and as the earth would not be a theatre sufficient for the occasion, they must meet the Lord in the air. Blessed, blessed summons to the godly! With what joy will they go forth to meet Him, whom unseen they loved, and out of whose fulness they received all the grace that ever they possessed, "their spirits being now made perfect," and "their vile body fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body!" On the other hand, with what reluctance are the ungodly dragged into his presence! How gladly would they hide themselves from him, if it were possible. Thousands, who were once the great and noble of the earth, and who thought there was none above them to whom they owed allegiance, will now curse the day that they were born, and "cry to the rocks and mountains to cover them" from the face of their offended Lord[m].]

Having stated this, he declares,

III. The blessed issue of it to the saints—

They "shall be ever with the Lord"—

[From him they will receive a sentence of acquittal, or rather of unqualified approbation, "Well done, good and faithful servants." To his right hand will they be called, as a prelude to the honour he is about to confer upon them. The judgment finished, he ascends with all his bright attendants to the heaven of heavens, the immediate residence of the Deity; and these his redeemed people now ascend together with him, to behold his glory in all its unclouded splendor[n], and to participate his throne, even as he participates his Father's throne[o]. O what fulness of joy do they now possess[p]! How bright their vision of his glory! how unbounded their fruition of his love! Nothing now could add to their felicity; nor can any thing now detract from it[q]. That too which constitutes its chief ingredient is, that it will be "for ever." Were this happiness to be only for a fixed period, however long, it would not be complete: the idea of its ultimate termination would rob it of half its value. But it will be pure and endless as the Deity himself.]

But how different the condition of the ungodly!

[They will be bidden to "depart *from him*; to depart accursed; to depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Alas! alas! what weeping, what wailing, what gnashing of teeth will they experience; and that also for ever and ever! Unhappy creatures! "Good were it for them, that they had never been born."]

He further suggests,

IV. The

[m] Rev. vi. 14—17. [n] John xvii. 24. [o] Rev. iii. 21.
[p] Ps. xvi. 11. [q] Rev. vii. 14—17. & xxii. 3—5.

IV. The improvement that should be made of this subject—

The word translated "comfort," is in the margin rendered "exhort." Either sense of the word is just; and therefore we will include both. This subject then should be improved by us,

1. In a way of mutual consolation—

[Have any of us been bereaved of dear and pious friends? "Let us not sorrow, as those who have no hope." What though they shall not come again to us? it is but a little time, and we shall go to them: and most blessed shall be our meeting at the right hand of God———Are we terrified at the thoughts of our own approaching dissolution? It is but "a sleep," if we belong to Jesus; it is a falling asleep in the Saviour's arms. What is there terrific in this? O put away your unbelieving fears; and learn to number death amongst your richest treasures[r]———]

2. In a way of mutual exhortation—

[Certainly the thoughts of a resurrection and a future judgment ought to fill us with holy awe: for the consequences of that judgment are such as no words can adequately express, nor any finite intelligence fully comprehend. We then would exhort every one of you, and do ye also exhort one another, in the words of the prophet, "Prepare to meet thy God." Remember the blessedness, "that is here spoken of, is to *those only who die in the Lord*:" and, if you would die in the Lord, you must *live in the Lord*: you must be in him, as the branch in the vine, by a living faith; and you must abide in him to your dying hour. Seek then "to be found in him, not having your own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in him." Then may you look forward to death as to a transient sleep, from which you shall awake in the morning of the Resurrection, to everlasting blessedness and glory.]

[r] 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

MLXIX.

WATCHFULNESS ENJOINED.

1 Thess. v. 1—8. *Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Yet*

Ye are all the children of the light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night: but let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love; and, for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

ON an occasion like the present, when God is so loudly speaking to us by his providence, I am anxious that His voice, and his alone, should be heard amongst us: for as, on the one hand, it would be peculiarly difficult so to speak, as to cut off all occasion for misconception, so, on the other hand, filled as your minds are with holy fear and reverence, it will be far more grateful to you to sit, as it were, at the feet of Jesus, and to hear what the Lord God himself shall say concerning you.[a] Methinks, in the spirit of your minds you are all, even this whole congregation, like Cornelius and his company, saying, "Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God:" yes, I would hope that each individual is now in the posture of Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." To meet these devout wishes in a suitable manner, I have chosen a portion of Scripture, which contains all that the occasion calls for, and bears the impress of Divine authority in every part. It comes home to our business and bosoms: it turns our minds from the distinguished individual whose loss we deplore, and fixes them on our own personal concerns; proclaiming to every one of us, "Prepare to meet thy God."

The point to which it more immediately calls our attention, is, the coming of our Lord to judgment. The precise period when that awful event shall take place, has never been revealed either to men or angels: it is "a secret which the Father has reserved in his own bosom." This only we know concerning it, that it will come suddenly and unexpected to all them that dwell on the earth: and therefore it is our wisdom to be always standing prepared for it. We believe indeed that it is yet

[a] Preached before the University of Cambridge, on occasion of the death of the Rev. Dr. Jowett, Regius Professor of Civil Law; Nov. 21, 1813.

yet far distant from us, because there are many prophecies which yet remain to be accomplished previous to its arrival: but to us the day of death is as the day of judgment; because as death finds us, so shall we appear at the bar of judgment; and "as the tree falleth, so will it lie" to all eternity. We shall therefore speak of death and judgment as, in effect, the same to us; and we shall notice in succession,

I. The uncertainty of the period when death shall arrive—

II. The character of those who are prepared for it—

III. The duty of all in reference to it.

I. As to the uncertainty of the period when death and judgment shall arrive, the idea is so familiar to our minds, and the truth of it so self-evident, that, as the Apostle intimates, ye have no need to have it brought before you. Yet though universally acknowledged as a truth, how rarely is it felt as a ground of action in reference to the eternal world! We look into the holy Scriptures, and there we see this truth written as with a sun-beam. We behold the whole human race surprised at the Deluge in the midst of all their worldly cares and pleasures, and all, except one little family, swept away by one common destruction. A similar judgment we behold executed on the Cities of the Plain: and these particular judgments are held forth to us as warnings of what we ourselves have reason to expect. Our blessed Lord says to us, "Be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not, the Son of Man cometh:" yet we cannot realize the thought, that death should ever so overtake us. Nay, we even try to put the conviction far from us, and, in every instance of sudden death that we hear of, endeavour to find some reason for the mortality of our neighbour; which does not attach to ourselves. When, as in the instance now before us, a person is snatched away suddenly, and in full health, as it were, we are constrained for a moment to reflect, that we also are liable to be called away: but it is surprising how soon the thought vanishes from our minds, and how little permanent effect remains. We are told, that our danger is in reality

reality increased by our security; and that we are then most of all exposed to the stroke of death, when we are most dreaming of "peace and safety:" yet we cannot awake from our torpor, or set ourselves to prepare for death and judgment. We are not altogether unconscious, that destruction, even inevitable and irremediable destruction, must be the portion of those who are taken unprepared; and yet we defer our preparation for eternity, in the hope of finding some more convenient season. We see our neighbour surprised, as by "a thief in the night;" and yet we hope, that notice will be given to us. We even bear about in our persons some disorders or infirmities which might warn us of our approaching end; and yet we look for another and another day, till, like a woman in travail, we are unexpectedly seized, and with great anguish of mind are constrained to obey the call.

Now whence is it, that, notwithstanding "we know perfectly" the uncertainty of life, we are so little affected with the consideration of it? If there were no future state of existence, we might account for it; because men would naturally put away from them any thoughts, which might diminish their enjoyment of present good. But, when this life is only a space afforded us to prepare for a better, and when an eternity of happiness or misery depends on our improvement of the present hour, it is truly amazing that we should be able to indulge so fatal a security. One would think that every one would be employing all the time that he could redeem from the necessary duties of life, in order to provide for his eternal state: one would think that he should scarcely give sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eye-lids, till he had obtained a clear evidence of his acceptance with God, and had "made his calling and election sure." But this is not the case: and therefore, evident as the truth is, we need to have it brought before us, and enforced on our minds and consciences by every argument that can be adduced.

Permit me then to remind those who are living in open sins, that they know not how soon they may be called into the presence of their God, with all their sins upon them.

them. And how will they endure the sight of their offended God? Will they, when standing at his tribunal, make as light of sin as they now do? Will they prevail on him to view it as mere youthful indiscretion, and unworthy of any serious notice? No, in truth: if any could come to us from the dead, they would not designate their crimes by such specious terms as they once used respecting them; but would tell us plainly, that "they who do such things cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Think then, ye who make a mock at sin, how soon your voice may be changed, and all your present sport be turned to "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth!"

Nor is it to open sinners only that we must suggest these thoughts: we must remind the moral also, and the sober, that death may quickly terminate their day of grace: yes, we must "put *them* in remembrance of these things, though they know them, and be established" in the belief of them. We mean not to undervalue sobriety and outward morality: no; we rejoice to see even an external conformity to Christian duties. But more than outward morality is wanting for our final acceptance with God. We must have a penitent and contrite spirit: we must seek refuge in Christ from all the curses of the broken law: we must be renewed in the spirit of our mind by the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost: we must be brought to live no longer to ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again. These things are absolutely and indispensably necessary to our Salvation: the form of godliness, how far soever it may carry us, will profit us nothing at the bar of judgment, if we possess not the power of it. How awful then is the thought, that, in a few days or weeks, those persons who are most respected and revered amongst us for their wisdom and learning, for their probity and honour, may be called to give up their account to God, before they have attained that vital godliness which must constitute their meetness for heaven!

But indeed the uncertainty of life speaks loudly to the best of men; it bids them to "stand upon their watch-tower," and be ready at every moment to meet their last enemy: for, as mere morality will profit little without

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real piety, so the lamp of outward profession will be of no service, if it be destitute of that oil which God alone can bestow.

It is a matter of consolation to us, however, that some are prepared for death, however suddenly it may come.

II. Who they are, and what their character is, we now come to shew—

The Scriptures everywhere draw a broad line of distinction between the true servants of Christ, and those who are such only in name and profession. Thus, in the words before us, they are called "Children of the light and of the day," in opposition to those who are "of the night and of darkness." Doubtless this distinction primarily referred to their having been brought out of the darkness of Heathen superstitions, into the marvellous light of the Gospel of Christ. But we must not suppose that it is to be limited to this. The ways of sin and ignorance are justly denominated darkness, no less than idolatry itself: and the paths of faith and holiness may be called "light," whether we have been brought into them suddenly from a state of heathenism, or gradually, under a profession of Christianity itself. Now of the Thessalonians he could say, in the judgment of charity, that "they *all* were Children of the light and of the day." The state of profession was very different then from what it is at this time: people did not embrace Christianity unless they had been strongly convinced of its truth; and the moment they did embrace it, they strove to "walk worthy of their high calling," and to stimulate each other to "adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things." The persecutions they suffered obliged them to have constant recourse to God in prayer for his support; and to watch carefully over their own conduct, that they might not give any just "occasion to their adversaries to speak reproachfully." Hence their religion was vital and practical, and very different from that which obtains among the professors of Christianity at this day. Now men are reputed Christians, though they have their affections altogether set upon the world, and their habits differing but little

little from those of Heathens. A man may be a Christian, though he drink, and swear, and commit evils, which ought scarcely to be so much as named amongst us. A man may be a Christian, though he have no real love to Christ, no sweet communion with him, no holy glorying in his cross and passion. But "ye have not so learned Christ, if so be ye have heard him, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus." The distinction between light and darkness is the same as ever: and those only who walk according to the example of the primitive Christians, can be called "the Children of the light and of the day." But those, whoever they be, are prepared for death: to them, though it may come suddenly, it cannot come unlooked for: it "cannot overtake them as a thief."

And such was that exalted character, whom it has pleased our God so suddenly to take from the midst of us. In whatever light we view him, he was a bright and consistent character, an ornament to his profession, an honour to his God. It is the peculiar excellence of religion, that it operates in every department of human life, and stimulates to an exemplary discharge of every duty. It is superfluous for me to mention, with what unwearied diligence, and distinguished ability, he filled the high office, which had been assigned him in this University; and how uniform have been his exertions, for upwards of thirty years, for the advancement of learning, the maintenance of order, and the due regulation of all the complicated concerns of the University at large. Long, long will his loss be felt, in every department which he had been called to fill. To him every one looked, as his most judicious friend, in cases of difficulty; assured that, whilst by his comprehensive knowledge he was well qualified to advise, he was warped by no prejudices, nor biassed by any interests: he ever both advised, and did, what he verily believed to be right in the sight of God. His superiority to all worldly considerations was strongly marked throughout the whole course of his life; more indeed to *his* honour, than the honour of those, by whom such eminent talents and such transcendent worth have for so long a period been overlooked.

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Had these excellencies arisen only from worldly principles,—though they would have shed a lustre over his character, and conferred benefits on the Body of which he was a member,—they would have availed little as a preparation for death and judgment: but they were the fruits of true religion in his soul. He had been brought out of the darkness of a natural state, and had been greatly enriched with Divine knowledge. He was indeed "mighty in the Scriptures:" his views of Divine truth were deep, and just, and accurate; and, above all, they were influential on the whole of his life and conduct. He not only beheld Christ as the Saviour of the world, but relied on him as his only hope, and cleaved to him with full purpose of heart, and gloried in him as his Lord, his God, and his whole Salvation. Nor was he satisfied with serving God in his closet: no; he confessed his Saviour openly; he was a friend and patron of religion, he encouraged it in all around him; he was not ashamed of Christ, nor of any of his faithful followers. He accounted it no degradation to shew in every way his attachment to the Gospel, and his full conviction that there is salvation in no other name under heaven but the name of Jesus Christ. He was, in the highest sense of the word, "a Child of light:" and verily he caused "his light so to shine before men," that all who beheld it were constrained to glorify God in his behalf.

To him then death came not as a thief in the night. Though it came suddenly, so suddenly that he had not the smallest apprehension of its approach, it found him not unprepared. His loins were girt, his lamp was trimmed, and he entered, a welcome guest, to the marriage-supper of his Lord.

O that we all might be found equally prepared, when the summons from on high shall be sent to us! O that we may have in our souls an evidence, that we also are "Children of the light and of the day!" Happy indeed would it be, if the state of religion amongst us were such, that we might adopt with truth the charitable expression in our text, "Ye *all* are children of the light and of the day." But if we cannot do this, we have at least reason to be thankful, that real piety is certainly more

more prevalent amongst us than it was some years ago; that prejudices against it have most astonishingly subsided; and that, where it does not yet reign, its excellence is secretly acknowledged; so that on this occasion we may doubt whether there be so much as one amongst us, who does not say in his heart, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Let me then proceed,

III. To point out the duty of all, in reference to that day—

We should "not sleep as do others." Those who put the evil day far from them, can live unmindful of their God, and regardless of the sentence that he shall pass upon them. They can go on dreaming of heaven and happiness in the eternal world, though they never walk in the way thither, or seek to obtain favour with their offended God. But let it not be thus with any who desire happiness beyond the grave. If ever we would behold the face of God in peace, we must improve our present hours in turning to him, and in labouring to perform his will. If the prize held out to those who wrestled, or ran, or fought, could not be obtained without the most strenuous exertions, much less can the glory of heaven be obtained, unless the acquisition of it be the great object of our lives. It is true indeed that "the Son of Man must give unto us the meat that endureth to everlasting life;" but still we must "labour for it" with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. To expect the end without using the means, is to reverse the decrees of heaven, and to deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin. We must "watch and be sober." It is an inordinate attachment to earthly things that keeps us from the pursuit of heavenly things. The cares, the pleasures, the honours of this life, engross all our attention, and leave us neither time nor inclination for higher objects. This groveling disposition we must resist and mortify. We must set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth; and must not only keep heaven constantly in view, but must so run as to obtain the prize. The men of this world affect dark-

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ness rather than light, as being more suited to the habits in which they delight to live. "They that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken, (if not lost to all sense of shame,) are drunken in the night:" but we, if indeed we are of the day, shall delight to "come forth to the light, that our deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." We should study the Holy Scriptures, not merely to acquire a critical knowledge of them, (though that is good and necessary in its place;) but to find what is the will of God, and what is that way in which he has commanded us to walk: and instead of being satisfied with doing what shall satisfy the demands of an accusing conscience, we must aspire after a perfect conformity to the Divine image, and endeavour to "walk in all things even as Christ himself walked."

But our duty is described in our text under some peculiar images, to which we shall do well to advert. We are supposed to be as sentinels, watching against the incursions of our spiritual foe. For our protection, armour of heavenly temper has been provided; "for a breast-plate, we are to put on faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation." We might, if it were needful, mark the suitableness of these various graces to the protection of the part which they are intended to defend. But as this would lead us rather from our main subject, we content ourselves with a general view of these graces, as necessary for the final attainment of everlasting salvation. We must put on *faith*, without which indeed we are exposed to the assualt of every enemy, and without any means of defence whatever. It is in Christ only that we have the smallest hope of acceptance with God; and in him alone have we those treasures of grace and strength which are necessary for a successful prosecution of our spiritual warfare: "He is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." But how must we obtain these things from him? It is by faith, and by faith only, that we can "receive them out of his fulness." This then is the first grace which we must cultivate; for according to our faith all other things will be unto us. To him we must look continually; renouncing every other confidence, and trusting

trusting altogether in him alone. In the fountain of his precious blood we must wash our guilty souls, or, as the Scripture expresses it, "Our garments must be made white in the blood of the Lamb." To him, under every conflict, we must cry for strength; for it is his grace alone that can be sufficient for us; and "through his strength communicated to us, we shall be able to do all things." Yet, notwithstanding all our exertions, we shall find that in many things we daily offend; and therefore, under every fresh contracted guilt, we must look to Him who is "our Advocate with the Father, and the propitiation for our sins." Hence it is that all our peace must flow; and hence we shall find a satisfactory answer to the accusations of every enemy: "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea rather, that is risen again, who also maketh intercession for us."

But together with this we must cultivate love; which indeed is the inseparable fruit of faith; for "faith worketh by love." Whether we understand "love" as having God or man for its object, or as comprehending both, it is a good defence against our spiritual enemies. For, if we truly love our God, who shall prevail upon us to offend him? If we "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," "who shall separate us from him? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No: in all these things we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us." And if we love our fellow-creatures as ourselves, we shall strive to benefit them to the utmost of our power; and account no sacrifice great, which may contribute to their welfare: we shall be ready to "suffer all things for the elect's sake," and even to "lay down our lives for the brethren."

Behold then, what a defence is here against the darts of our enemies! Who shall be able to pierce our breast, when so protected? We may defy all the confederate armies of earth and hell: "for I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able

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to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

For the protection of our head there is an helmet provided, even "the hope of Salvation." Let a man have been "begotten to a lively hope in Christ Jesus, to a hope of that inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us," and will he barter it away for the things of time and sense? or will he suffer his views of heaven to be clouded by the indulgence of any unhallowed lusts? No: he will contend with every enemy of his soul: he will "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts:" he will "lay aside every weight, and the sins that most easily beset him, and will run with patience the race that is set before him, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of his faith." Instead of forgetting the great day of the Lord, he will be "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of Christ." Though willing to live for the good of others, he will "desire rather for himself to depart, that he may be with Christ, which is far better" than any enjoyment that can be found on earth. "Not that he will desire so much to be unclothed," because of any present troubles, as to "be clothed upon, that mortality may be swallowed up of life."

This armour then must be procured; this armour must be worn; and, clothed in it, we must watch against all our enemies.

And though others sleep, yet must not we: yea, if all around us should be drowned in sleep, yet must not we give way to slumber: if to be sober and vigilant must of necessity make us singular, we must dare to be singular, even as Elijah in the midst of Israel, or as Noah in the Antediluvian world. If it be true that none but those who are children of the light and of the day are ready for death and judgment, let us come forth to the light without delay, and endeavour to walk in the light, even as God himself is in the light. His word his light: it shews us in all things how to walk and to please him: it sets before us examples also, in following whom we shall by faith and patience inherit the promises, as they now do. Let this word then be taken as a light to our

feet, and a lantern to our paths: and let us follow it in all things, as those that would approve themselves to the heart-searching God. Let us not listen to any vain excuses for delay. We see, in the instance before us, how suddenly we may be called away, and how soon our day of grace may come to a close. And how terrible will it be, if that day should overtake us as a thief! Let us be wise: I beseech you all, by the tender mercies of God, to have compassion on your own souls, and to "work while it is day, knowing that the night cometh wherein no man can work."

MLXX.

QUENCHING THE SPIRIT.

1 Thess. v. 19. *Quench not the Spirit.*

THERE is a harmony between all Christian graces, and a dependence of one upon another; so that none can be exercised aright, unless all be allowed their due place and influence. There are doubtless many occasions of grief and sorrow; yet no circumstances are so afflictive, but we may find in them some ground of joy and gratitude. Hence, in the directions which the Apostle gives to the Thessalonian Church, he bids them to "rejoice evermore," and "in every thing to give thanks." But to moderate our feelings, and to combine them in such a proportion as occasions may require, is difficult, yea impossible, to flesh and blood. In this arduous work, we must be directed and assisted by the Spirit of God. In this connexion, the caution in the text is extremely forcible: for if we be not attentive to improve the proffered aids of the Spirit, we shall never be able to execute any other part of our Christian duty.

The words before us may have some reference to the extraordinary *gifts* of the Spirit; but, being inserted amidst exhortations to various *graces*, they must be understood in reference to them also.

They contain a very solemn caution; in discoursing upon which we shall,

I. Con-

I. Consider the operations of the Spirit under the emblem of fire—

The Spirit is frequently spoken of under the emblem of fire[a]: and fire justly represents his offices and operations—

[Kindle a fire in a dark place, and it will *give light* to all around it. Draw near to it when chilled with cold, and it will *warm and comfort you.* Cast wood or straw upon it, and it will cause them to *burst forth into a flame.* Suppose it heated to a furnace, and, if you put stones into it, it will *break and dissolve them.* Let gold or silver be submitted to its action, and it will *purge* them *from* their *dross.* Let iron be cast into it, and it will *transform* the metal *into its own likeness*, so that it shall come out a solid mass of fire.

Here we see the operations of the Spirit. It is his office to *enlighten* the mind[b]; nor had the Apostles themselves any light which they did not derive from him[c]. Call upon him in a state of great dejection; and he will be your *Comforter*[d]. Beg of him to reveal to you the Father's love, and the grace of Christ; and he will *inflame* your soul with love and gratitude[e]. Submit your stony heart to his powerful operations; and he will *break* it in pieces, as he did in the days of old[f], and will *melt* it to contrition[g]. Carry your corruptions to him to be subdued; and he will *purify* your soul from their power and defilement[h]. Let him exert his full influence upon you; and he will *assimilate* you to himself, and *transform* you into the very image of your God[i].]

Such being the operations of the Spirit, we shall,

II. Shew in what way we may "quench" them[k]—

We may quench the Spirit in a variety of ways:

1. By

[a] Acts ii. 3, 4. Matt. iii. 11. Rev. iv. 5. [b] Eph. i. 17, 18.
[c] 1 Cor. ii. 12. [d] John xiv. 16, 17, 26. 2 Cor. vii. 6.
[e] John xvi. 14. Rom. v. 5. & xv. 13. [f] Acts ii. 37.
[g] Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. [h] Ib. ver. 25. & 1 Cor. vi. 11.
[i] 2 Cor. iii. 18.

[k] There are passages of Scripture which seem to militate against this doctrine: see John iv. 14. & 1 John iii. 9. But give them all the force you please, they do not prove, that sin will not quench the Spirit; or, that they who live and die in sin shall not perish. And to bring them forward on such an occasion, is to weaken (and, in reference to many, to destroy) the force of the Apostle's admonition. The caution is addressed to all Christians without distinction; and therefore ought to be enforced in that extent. The very giving of the caution sufficiently shews the possibility and danger of our quenching the Spirit; and therefore we should all attend to it with fear and trembling.

1. By resisting his operations—

[There is not any one, on whom the Spirit has not frequently exerted his influence, to bring him to repentance. But how have his motions been regarded? Have they not in many instances been resisted? Have we not plunged ourselves into business or pleasure, perhaps too into revelling and intoxication, in order to drown his voice, and silence the remonstrances of our conscience?

This then is one way in which many quench the Spirit. God has warned us, that "his Spirit shall not always strive with man[l]:" and has told us how he dealt with his people of old; that "because they hearkened not to his voice and would none of him, he gave them up to their own hearts' lusts[m]." And a similar resistance on our part will bring the same judgment upon us[n].]

2. By delaying to comply with them—

[Few, if any, are so impious as to determine that they will never turn to God. Men deceive themselves with some faint purposes of turning to God at a future period. Thus, when the Spirit "knocks at the door of their hearts[nn]," they send him away, as Felix did St. Paul, with an intention to "send for him at a more convenient season." But, as in the instance alluded to, the more convenient season never came, so it too often happens with respect to us. The Spirit is a sovereign agent, that is not at our command: he is "a wind that bloweth where he listeth:" and, if we will not spread our sails to the wind, and avail ourselves of the advantage afforded us, we may bemoan our lost opportunity when it is too late[o].]

3. By entertaining sentiments inimical to them—

[It is not uncommon for those whose consciences are awakened to a sense of their condition, to take refuge in *infidel* opinions. If they do not call in question the divine authority of the Scriptures, they doubt the veracity of God in them, and deny the certainty and duration of the punishment which he denounces against impenitent sinners. Others adopt an *antinomian* creed; and from some experience which they suppose themselves to have had of the divine life, conclude they shall never be suffered finally to perish, notwithstanding their present experience attests their hypocrisy and self-deceit. But all of these are "speaking peace to themselves when there is no peace;" and, if they be not roused from their delusions, will soon reap the bitter fruits of their folly[oo].]

4. By indulging habits contrary to his mind and will—

[God

[l] Gen. vi. 3. [m] Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. [n] Prov. i. 24—26.
[nn] Rev. iii. 20. [o] Isai. lv. 6.
[oo] Jer. viii. 11. Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

[God abhors iniquity of every kind: nor will he dwell in any heart that is allowedly debased by sin. If then we harbour pride, envy, malice, covetousness, uncleanness, or any other secret lust, we shall provoke him to abandon us to ourselves[p]: for he has said, "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy[pp]."]

Lest any of you should be inattentive to the operations of the Spirit on your hearts, we shall,

III. Enforce the caution not to quench them—

Consider then,

1. Whom it is that you resist—

[It may appear to us to be only a friend or Minister, or, at most, our own conscience, that we resist: but, whatever be the means whereby God speaks to us, the voice is his; and an opposition to the dictates of the Spirit is an opposition to God himself[q]. Have we sufficiently considered *whom* we thus "provoke to become our enemy[r]?"]

2. What is his design, in striving with you—

[Has God any interest of his own to serve? Will he be less happy or glorious, whether we be saved or perish? He is moved by nothing but love and pity to our souls. And all that he desires is, to enlighten, sanctify, and save us. The first impressions that he makes upon us may be painful; but they are a needful incision, in order to a perfect cure. And should we resist his love and mercy? In what light shall we view this conduct, when his gracious designs shall be fully known, and our ingratitude be contrasted with them?]

3. How awful will be our state, if we finally prevail to quench his motions—

[While he continues to strive with us, there is hope. If there be but a spark of this heavenly fire within us, the dying embers may be rekindled: but if once this fire be extinguished, there is no hope. If God has once said, "Let him alone[s], let him live only to fill up the measure of his iniquities, and to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath[t]," our state will be inconceivably dreadful: better would it be for us that we had never been born. And who can tell but that this very day the Spirit may depart from him never to return? Let the dread of this awaken us to a sense of our danger, and stimulate us to improve the calls and assistances we now enjoy.]

ADVICE

[p] Ps. lxvi. 18.
[pp] 1 Cor. iii. 17.
[q] Acts v. 4.
[r] Isai. lxiii. 10.
[s] Hos. iv. 17.
[t] Rom. ii. 5.

ADVICE—

1. Renounce every thing that may lead you to quench the Spirit—

[Do ungodly companions try to lull you asleep in sin? forsake them. Do earthly, sensual, and devilish affections grieve the Spirit? mortify them. Whatever it be that tends to damp this sacred fire, put it away. Better were it to lose all that we have in the world, than to have the Spirit finally taken from us.]

2. Do all that you can to stir up the sacred fire within you—

[Fire will go out, if left to itself. We are commanded to "stir it up[u]." This must be done by meditation[x], by prayer[y], by reading of the word of God[z], by attending on divine ordinances[a], and by holy and spiritual conversation[b]. Watch then the motions of the Spirit, and delay not to comply with them. Let every thing serve as fuel to the flame: and, how much soever you delight in God, endeavour to abound more and more.]

[u] ἀναζωπυρεῖν, 2 Tim. i. 6. [x] Ps. xxxix. 3.
[y] Ps. xl. 1—3. [z] Jer. xxiii. 29. Heb. iv. 12.
[a] Acts x. 33, 34. [b] Luke xxiv. 32.

MLXXI.

ABSTAINING FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL.

1 Thess. v. 22. *Abstain from all appearance of evil.*

SIN is a tremendous evil. The consequences of one single sin are beyond all our powers of thought or conception. If one only be hardened by it, who can tell where his influence may extend, or through how many generations it may be transmitted? To the individual who commits it, who shall say how much evil will accrue? The Spirit may be grieved; the conscience, seared; and Satan may get an advantage that shall never be regained. Hence arises the necessity of standing at the remotest distance from evil: for if a thing be not evil, yet, if it appear to be so, it has all the effect of a positive evil to those who behold it. We should therefore "abstain even from all appearance of evil."

In

In discoursing on this subject, we shall consider,

I. The injunction itself—

This may relate to,

1. The things we do—

[That which is perfectly indifferent in itself, may either appear wrong, or really be so, according to the circumstances under which it is done. The eating of things offered to idols, or the observance of certain days, were indifferent in themselves; and a person might either do or forbear these things, without improving or injuring the state of his soul[a]. But if the doing or forbearing these things had any influence to ensnare the consciences of others, it was the duty of every person to pursue that line of conduct which was most inoffensive[b]. St. Paul thought, that though "all things were lawful for him; all things were not expedient[c];" and therefore exercised self-denial with respect to things innocent in themselves, lest his influence should induce others, who were less acquainted with Christian liberty, to follow his example, in opposition to the suggestions of their own consciences[d]. Ezra might have asked a guard to protect him through the Desert[e]; and Nehemiah might have gone into the Temple, to save himself from danger[f]: but they both chose rather to expose their lives to any peril, rather than do what in their circumstances would have been open to misconstruction, and would have been imputed to them as sin. Thus there are some amusements and indulgences which, under particular circumstances and in a limited degree, *may be* innocent, from which we nevertheless ought to abstain; lest an undue advantage be taken of our conduct, and we be considered as patronizing that, which, under other circumstances, would be positively evil.]

2. The manner in which we do them—

[Much, very much, depends on the manner in which we do things which in themselves are inoffensive or even good. None can doubt but that alms-deeds, prayer, and fasting, are good in themselves; yet they may be so performed as to be open to the imputation of vanity or hypocrisy: on which account our Lord gives us rules for the due discharge of these duties[g]. To give instruction or reproof to our neighbours is doubtless an important office; but if it be performed in an unbecoming spirit, we shall appear to others to be only venting our own spleen, and all our endeavours will be lost upon them. Hence is that direction given us by the Apostle, "Let not your good be evil spoken of[h]."]

3. The

[a] 1 Cor. viii. 8. & Rom. xiv. 2—6.
[b] Rom. xiv. 20, 21.
[c] 1 Cor. x. 23.
[d] 1 Cor. viii. 13.
[e] Ezra vii. 16—18. with viii. 22.
[f] Neh. vi. 10—31.
[g] Matt. vi. 1—6, 16—18.
[h] Rom. xiv. 16.

3. The end for which we do them—

[Daniel might with great propriety have prayed in his house with his windows shut: yea, it might have been thought, perhaps, more decorous. But, in his circumstances, he determined to die rather than to suspend his devotions, or even to conceal them by shutting his windows. He was in the midst of idolaters, and therefore he judged it necessary openly to confess his God. And, when the edict was issued by the Persian monarch to forbid the offering of any petition to any one except himself for the space of thirty days, Daniel was more bound than ever to worship openly; because the concealing of his devotions would have been considered as a renunciation or denial of his God. Hence he determined to make no alteration whatever in his conduct, but to abide the consequences of his fidelity to God[i]. Thus should *we* walk circumspectly, "cutting off occasion from them that seek occasion;" and determining that our enemies "shall find no cause of complaint against us, except concerning the law of our God[k]."]

To impress this injunction the more deeply on our minds, let us consider,

II. The importance of it—

The avoiding of all appearance of evil is of great consequence,

1. To ourselves—

[Our character is stamped by our actions *as they appear to the world.* God only can judge the heart: man must of necessity form his judgment in a great measure from the outward appearance: though doubtless he is to put the best possible construction upon every thing, as far as truth and reason will admit. We owe it therefore to ourselves to guard against every thing that either deservedly or undeservedly may bring an evil report upon us. St. Paul was very attentive to this, when he had collected a large sum of money for the poor saints in Judea: he desired that some person of established reputation should go with him, that so he might "provide things honest in the sight of all men[l]," and "give no occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully[m]."]

2. To the world around us—

[The world are ever ready to spy out causes of complaint against the people of God, and, when they behold a flaw, to cry out, "There, there, so would we have it." Instantly they proceed to blame religion itself for what they see amiss in the professors of it; and justify themselves as acting a more becoming and consistent

[i] Dan. vi. 10. [k] Dan. vi. 5. [l] 2 Cor. viii. 19—21.
[m] 1 Tim. v. 14.

consistent part. On this account we should "walk in wisdom towards them that are without[n]," and, if possible, "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well-doing[o]." Indeed, as they may be hardened in their sins by an injudicious conduct, so they may be "won by the good conversation" of those around them[p]. It may be, that our light shining before them may constrain them to confess that God is with us of a truth, and lead them to "glorify our Father that is in heaven[q]." Can we need any greater argument for circumspection? Should not this consideration induce us all to adopt the Psalmist's resolution: "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way[r];" and make us pray with him, "Lead me, O Lord, because of mine observers; make thy way straight before my face[s]."]

3. To the Church of God—

[A discreet and blameless conduct is no less important as it respects the Church. The weak are of necessity much influenced by those whom they consider as more advanced than themselves: and, if they see any thing done by a person whom they respect, they will be ready to follow his example, even though they are doubtful in their minds respecting the lawfulness of the act itself. Then, even though the act be lawful, they commit sin, because they are not thoroughly persuaded of its innocence[t]. And we, if we pay no attention to their weaknesses, actually sin against Christ ourselves, and are guilty of destroying a soul for whom Christ died[u]. Let us not then imagine ourselves at liberty to do all things which are in themselves lawful; for we are not at liberty to cast a stumbling-block before a weak brother[x]; but are to consult his good, no less than our own[y].]

INFER,

1. How far are they from real Christians who can live in known and allowed sin!

[Christianity requires us to abstain even from the appearance of evil: how much more from sin itself! Ah, Beloved, you may easily see the folly and hypocrisy of calling yourselves Christians, while your whole conduct proclaims that you have no delight in God, nor any higher aim than to approve yourselves to men.]

2. How excellent is the true Christian in comparison of others!

[Christians are not improperly called "the excellent of the earth."

[n] Col. iv. 5. [o] 1 Pet. ii. 15. [p] 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2.
[q] Matt. v. 16. [r] Ps. ci. 2.
[s] Ps. v. 8. the marginal translation. [t] Acts xiv. 23.
[u] 1 Cor. viii. 9—12. [x] Rom. xiv. 13. 15. [y] 1 Cor. x. 24.

earth." Behold their care, their tenderness, their circumspection, their "dread of even a garment spotted by the flesh[z]." Their conduct is fitly described by the Apostle; "Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, these they both think upon," and perform[a]. "See then, Christians, that these things be in you, and abound." Let not "our boasting of you be found vain" and delusive. But "as ye have received how ye ought to walk and to please God, so abound more and more[b]."]

[z] Jude, ver. 23. [a] Phil. iv. 8. [b] 1 Thess. iv. 1.

MLXXII.

COMPLETE SANCTIFICATION TO BE SOUGHT AFTER.

1 Thess. v. 23, 24. *The very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God, your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you; who also will do it.*

PARENTS naturally desire the prosperity of their children; but they can by no means secure it: even though their children should be disposed to concur with them in every prudent plan, yet cannot their combined efforts insure success; since, in numberless instances, "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." The Spiritual Parent, who by the ministration of the Gospel hath begotten sons and daughters to the Lord, is more favourably circumstanced: he is sure that no untoward circumstances shall disappoint his hopes, provided only his children exert themselves as becomes them, in the appointed way. True indeed it is, that success in spiritual things is infinitely more difficult to be obtained, on account of the obstacles which are to be surmounted, and the enemies which are to be subdued. But Omnipotence is engaged in behalf of all who sincerely labour for themselves: nor is there any attainment, to which they who go forward in the strength of God, may not confidently aspire. The object which St. Paul desired in behalf of his Thessalonian converts was doubtless exceeding great: it was, that they might be "sanctified throughout, and be preserved blameless unto the day of Christ:" but "his

"his hope concerning them was stedfast," being founded, not on their weak powers, but on the power and fidelity of God, who had undertaken to "perfect that which concerned them[a]." In illustrating the words before us, we shall notice,

I. The blessing desired—

This was the greatest that mortal man can enjoy on earth: it was,

1. The sanctification of their whole man—

[Man is usually spoken of as consisting of two parts, a body and a soul: but he may, perhaps with more propriety, be considered as having three parts;—a corporeal substance; an animal soul, like that which exists in the lower orders of creation; and a rational immortal spirit, which connects him with the world above. This distinction between the soul and spirit is to be found also in the Epistle to the Hebrews; where it is said, that "the word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder the soul and spirit[b]." In all of these parts, man is corrupt: "his body, in all its members, is only, and invariably, an instrument of unrighteousness unto sin[c]:" his animal soul, with all its affections and lusts, leads him to those gratifications only, of which the brutes partake in common with him[d]: and his immortal soul is filled with all those evil dispositions which characterize the fallen angels, such as, pride, envy, malice, discontent, and rebellion against God. These different kinds of wickedness are frequently distinguished by the Apostle, according to the sources from whence they spring: he speaks of the unconverted man as "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind[e];" and tells us, that we must "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, if we would perfect holiness in the fear of God[f]." Agreeably to these distinctions, the character of fallen man is, that he is "earthly, sensual, and devilish[g]." In all of these parts, then, we need to be renewed and sanctified: we need to have our bodies made instruments of "righteousness unto holiness[h];" our souls, with "their affections and lusts, crucified[i];" and our spirits "renewed after the Divine image, in righteousness and true holiness[k]." Hence St. Paul prays for the Thessalonian converts, that they may be sanctified "*wholly*," that is, *throughout their whole man*, even "in their whole spirit, and soul, and body." This, and this only, will constitute us "new creatures:" "the old things" pertaining to every part of us must "have passed

[a] Ps. cxxxviii. 8.
[b] Heb. iv. 12.
[c] Rom. vi. 12, 13.
[d] Jude, ver. 10.
[e] Eph. ii. 3.
[f] 2 Cor. vii. 1.
[g] Jam. iii. 15.
[h] Rom. vi. 19.
[i] Gal. v. 24.
[k] Eph. iv. 23, 24.

passed away, and all things must have become new[l]:" then alone can we be said to be "partakers of the Divine nature[m];" and then alone have we any satisfactory evidence that we are Christians indeed[n].

This entire change was the first part of the blessing which St. Paul solicited in their behalf. But he could not be satisfied with this: he therefore further intreated,]

2. The continuance of it unto the day of Christ—

[To be made thus "blameless" is doubtless an unspeakable blessing; but it would be of little service to us, if we were to lose it again, and to return to our former state of sin and uncleanness. This is an idea which many lovers of human systems do not like: but it is inculcated in every part of the holy Scriptures: nor can any man get rid of this idea, without doing violence to many of the plainest passages of Holy Writ, and, I had almost said, "wresting them to his own destruction."

By the prophet Ezekiel, God tells us, that, "if the righteous man depart from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, his righteousness shall no more be remembered; but for the iniquity that he committeth, he shall die[o]." St. Paul warns us, "that, if after tasting of the heavenly gift, and being made partakers of the Holy Ghost, we fall away, it is impossible, (or so difficult as to be all but impossible,) for us ever to be renewed unto repentance[p]." St. Peter speaks yet more plainly, assuring us, that, "if after having escaped the pollutions of the world *through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, we be again entangled therein, and overcome, our latter end will be worse than the beginning: for that it would be better for us never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us[q]."

Hence St. Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, that they might "be preserved blameless unto the day of Christ." To run well for a season would avail them nothing, if they were hindered at last. To little purpose would they have "begun in the Spirit, if they ended in the flesh." We must "endure to the end, if ever we would be saved[r]." And so important is this truth, and so necessary to be inculcated on the minds of even the most exalted Christians, that our blessed Lord himself, in his Letters to the Seven Churches, closes every Letter with this solemn admonition, that "to him that overcometh," and *to him only*, shall the full blessings of his salvation ever be extended[s] — — — Hence are those frequent cautions against declension in the life and power of godliness[t]. The Lord grant we may ever bear them in mind! for God

[l] 2 Cor. v. 17. [m] 2 Pet. i. 4, [n] Note [l].
[o] Ezek. xviii. 24. [p] Heb. vi. 4—6. [q] 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.
[r] Matt. xxiv. 13. [s] Rev. ii. 7, 10, 17, 26. & iii. 5, 12, 21.
[t] 2 John, ver. 8. Rev. iii. 11. 2 Pet. iii. 14, 17, 18.

God himself expressly says, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him[u]."

On these accounts the Apostle prayed for them, that "the work begun in them might be carried on and perfected unto the day of Christ[x]."]

Vast as this blessing was, he did not doubt of obtaining it in their behalf. This appears from,

II. The assurance given—

To the attainment of this blessed state God "calleth us" in his Gospel—

[*"God* hath not called us to uncleanness, but unto holiness," even to the highest measure of it that can possibly be attained. He says not only, "Be ye holy, *for* I am holy[y];" but, "Be ye holy, *as* I am holy," and "perfect, *as* your Father which is in heaven is perfect[z]."]

And, as "the God of peace," he promises to raise us to it—

[God, having given us his Son to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, and to "make reconciliation for us through the blood of the cross," is pleased to reveal himself to us under the endearing character of "the God of peace:" and being now "*our* God and Father in Christ Jesus," he undertakes to do for us all that shall be necessary for our final acceptance with him in the day of judgment. He promises to "sprinkle clean water upon us, and to cleanse us from all our filthiness, and from all our idols[a]." He teaches us also to look, not to his mercy only, or his power, to effect this, but to his truth and faithfulness, yea, and to his very justice too: "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness[b]." This, I say, he promises to us, being first of all become, through the atoning blood of Christ, a "God of peace." We are not to get sanctification first, and then, in consequence of that sanctification, to find him a "God of peace;" but first to look to him as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, and then to experience the sanctifying operations of his Spirit. This order must be particularly noticed in our text, as also in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where it is particularly marked[c]: if we overlook this, we shall be in danger of misapprehending and perverting the whole Gospel of Christ: but if we bear this in mind, then may we expect from God a full and complete salvation. In many places does he pledge his faithfulness to do for us all that we can stand in need of, and never to discontinue his mercies towards us[d]——— He may punish

[u] Heb. x. 38. [x] Phil. i. 6. [y] 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.
[z] Matt. v. 48. [a] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.
[b] 1 John i. 9. [c] Heb. xiii. 20, 21.
[d] 1 Cor. i. 8, 9. & 2 Thess. iii. 3.

punish us, and hide his face from us; but he will not utterly abandon us, or cast us off[e].]

We must, however, be found in the diligent use of the appointed means—

[The dependence of his blessing on the use of the appointed means is not always expressed; but it is always implied. "He will be inquired of by us," before he will do for us the things which he has most freely promised[f]. He has appointed the means as well as the end, or rather I should say, the end by the means: he has "chosen us to salvation; but it is through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth[g]." He alone has the power whereby our salvation must be effected, as the words of our text very strongly imply[h]: but he expects that we exert ourselves, as much as if all the power resided in our own arm: and the very consideration which many persons urge as a reason for their inactivity, is suggested by him as a reason and encouragement for our most strenuous exertions[i]. If we will not ask, and seek, and strive, we must expect nothing at his hands: but if we will put forth our own feeble energies in the way of duty, he will "strengthen us by his Spirit in our inward man," and "make us more than conquerors through Him that loved us."]

From this subject we may *learn*,

1. How mistaken they are who think that the Gospel leads to licentiousness—

[What symptom of licentiousness is here? Rather, may we not challenge every religious system in the universe to produce morality like unto this? Other systems provide for "the cleansing of the outside of the cup and platter;" but no other so effectually reaches the heart. The Gospel provides for the sanctification of all our faculties and powers, and for the transformation of our whole man into the very image of our God. Its language is, "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace[k]." And its effect is, to produce in every mind the desire which is so affectionately expressed in the text, and not for others only, but for ourselves also. Let all jealousy then on this head be put aside: and let us seek to be justified freely by faith in Christ; that, having peace with God through his precious blood, we may receive the communications of his grace more abundantly, and be "changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of our God."]

2. How deluded they are who rest in Christian principles, without aspiring after Christian attainments—

[Such there have been in every age of the Church. Not that the Gospel has in itself any tendency to create such characters; but

[e] Ps. lxxxix. 30—36. Jer. xxxii. 40.
[f] Ezek. xxxvi. 37.
[g] 2 Thess. ii. 13. 1 Pet. i. 2.
[h] αὐτὸς ὁ Θεός.
[i] Phil. ii. 12, 13.
[k] Rom. vi. 14.

but the corruption of men's hearts will take occasion from the Gospel to foster sentiments, which are, in reality, subversive of its most fundamental truths. Many regard all exhortations to holiness as legal: yea, there are not wanting some who will maintain, that Christ, having fulfilled the law for us, has absolved us from all obligation to obey it in any of its commands. They affirm that it is cancelled, not only as a covenant of works, but *as a rule of life*. They profess, that the sanctification of Christ is imputed to us, precisely as his righteousness is; and that we need no personal holiness, because we have a sufficient holiness in him. Horrible beyond expression are such sentiments as these: and how repugnant they are to those contained in our text, it is needless to observe. That some who advance these sentiments are externally moral, and often benevolent, must be confessed: (if any be truly pious, it is not *by means of* these principles, but *in spite of* them:) but the great body of them, with, if is to be feared, but few exceptions, bear the stamp of their unchristian principles in their whole spirit and conduct. The whole family of them may be distinguished by the following marks. They are full of *pride* and *conceit*, imagining that none can understand the Gospel but themselves. Such is their *confidence* in their own opinions, that they seem to think it impossible that they should err. They are *dogmatical* in the extreme, laying down the law for every one, and expecting all to bow to their judgment: and so *contemptuous* are they, that they speak of all as blind and ignorant who presume to differ from them. Their *irreverent* manner of treating the great mysteries of our religion is also most offensive; they speak of them with a most unhallowed familiarity, as though they were common things: and so *profane* are they, that they hesitate not to sneer at the very word of God itself, whenever it militates against their favourite opinions. "By these fruits ye shall know them;" and by these fruits ye may judge of their principles. True indeed, with their errors they bring forth much that is sound and good: but this only renders their errors the more palatable and the more delusive. They altogether vitiate the taste of the religious world, and indispose them for all practical instruction. They so exclusively set forth what may be called "the strong meat" of the Gospel, as to withhold all "milk" from the household of our God[1]. In a word, they promote nothing but *spiritual intoxication*, and banish from the Church all *spiritual sobriety*.

In what we have said, we design not to mark the characters of any particular *men*, but the character and effect of their *principles*: and we do not hesitate to say again, that this is the true character and effect of *Antinomianism*, wherever it exists.

In opposition to all who would thus make "Christ a Minister of sin," we must declare, that he came to save his people, not *in* their

[1] Heb. v. 13, 14. 1 Cor. iii. 2.

their sins, but *from* them[m]; and that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation, teaches, and must ever teach, men to live righteously, and soberly, and godly in this present world[n]," yea, and to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God[o]."]

3. How blessed they are who have obtained peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ—

[You are not called to "make bricks without straw." That God, who is now reconciled to you through the Son of his love, undertakes to supply you with "grace sufficient for you[p]," and to "fulfil in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, even the work of faith with power[q]." And is he not *able* to do this? or will he forget his promises, or "suffer one jot or tittle of his word to fail?" No: "He is faithful who hath promised, who also will do it." Be of good courage then, whatever difficulties ye may have to encounter. Know, that "greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world[r]." Gird on the armour which is provided for you, and "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus[s]." Our prayer for you is the same as that of St. Paul for the Thessalonian Christians: yes, Beloved, "this is our wish, even your perfection[t]." And we rejoice in the thought that "God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye, having always all-sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work[u]." Only look to him as "a God of love and peace," and you shall find that "what he hath promised he is able also to perform[x]."]

[m] Matt. i. 21. [n] Tit. ii. 11, 12. [o] Col. iv. 12.
[p] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [q] 2 Thess. i. 11. [r] 1 John iv. 4.
[s] Eph. vi. 10, 11. 2 Tim. ii. 1. [t] 2 Cor. xiii. 9.
[u] 2 Cor. ix. 8. [x] Rom. iv. 21.

MLXXIII.

THE STATE OF THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH.

2 Thess. i. 3—7. *We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth: so that we ourselves glory in you in the Churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest.*

ONE advantage which we derive from the Epistles of St. Paul is, that we are enabled to see in them an endless

endless diversity both of characters and attainments. Every occurrence in the different cities where the Apostolic Churches were planted, has given occasion for suitable remarks, which, though adapted in the first instance to a particular place or circumstance, are applicable in some considerable degree to the Church of God in all ages. In some of the Epistles we have the Church presented to us in a declining state; and suitable admonitions are given to her: in others, we see her prospering, and hear the counsels of infinite wisdom proclaimed unto her. The Thessalonian Church was of the latter character, and seems to have been eminently favoured of her God. She was high in the esteem also of the apostle Paul; and deservedly so, because she was conspicuous amongst all the Churches of that age for her high attainments. The words I have just read will lead me to consider,

I. The happy state of the Thessalonian Church—

In her infant state she was highly commended for "her works of faith, and labours of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ[a]." But here we view her in her more adult state: we behold,

1. Her increasing faith—

[The Apostle testifies respecting the Believers there, that their faith "had grown exceedingly," being daily more vivid in its apprehensions, more vigorous in its actings, more uniform in its effects. It is of the very nature of faith to fix on things that are invisible, and to make them, as it were, present to the soul. And in this their faith had evinced its growth, in that it had enabled them to see, almost as with their bodily eyes, the Saviour whom they loved, enthroned above all powers and principalities, invested with a fulness of all spiritual gifts, ordering all things both in heaven and earth, and, by his prevailing intercession at the right hand of God, securing to his believing people all the blessings of grace and glory. They further saw, as from Mount Pisgah, the land of which they were ere long to take possession: the thrones, the crowns, the harps of gold, all prepared and made ready for them, against the time appointed for their complete possession of their inheritance. Of these things they had some view at first, just as a man has of the firmament on a cloudy night: but now, as when through a pure unclouded atmosphere,

[a] 1 Thess. i. 3.

atmosphere, a man beholds the vast canopy of heaven studded in every part with stars more brilliant than the brightest gem; so now their view of Christ, and of all the inconceivable glories of redeeming love, was clear and full. A corresponding energy too was felt through all the powers of their souls, accompanied with a fixed determination of heart to live for Him who lived and died for them.]

2. Her abounding love—

[This was no less remarkable. In almost every Church, partly from a diversity of views and interests, and partly from the infirmity of our common nature, there are some comparative alienations of heart, if not some actual disagreements. But here "the charity of *every one of them all* towards each other *abounded*." One spirit pervaded the whole body: and time, instead of giving occasion to the enemy to foment differences, had only cemented and confirmed their mutual affection. In this they shewed how much they were grown in grace, seeing that they were so greatly assimilated to the image of their God, whose name and nature is LOVE. Happy, happy people, where "the unity of the Spirit was so perseveringly kept in the bond of peace!"]

3. The invincible firmness of her patience—

[Great had been their trials from the very beginning[b]: and though we know but little of particulars, we are assured in general, that the persecutions which they experienced from their own countrymen were of the most cruel and bitter kind[c]. But were they intimidated? No: "they held fast the profession of their faith without wavering:" they "were in nothing terrified by their adversaries:" "they had respect unto the recompence of the reward;" and took joyfully the afflictions with which they were visited, knowing that they had in heaven enough to compensate for all. They even "gloried in the cross of Christ," and "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to bear it for his sake." In the midst of all they "possessed their souls in patience," and suffered "patience to have its perfect work."

What an enviable state was this! But,]

That we may form a right estimate of this state, let us consider,

II. In what light the Apostle viewed it—

He knew not to give flattering words to any man: yet he could not but declare that he regarded their state as a fit subject,

1. Of thanksgiving to God—

[God was the Author of the grace they first received: and he was

[b] 1 Thess. i. 6. [c] 1 Thess. ii. 14, 15.

was the giver also of all the improvement they had made of it. "Of him, and him alone, was all their fruit found." To him therefore the Apostle gave the glory, "as it was fit" he should, and as he felt himself "bound" to do. The creation of the material world was his: nor was the new creation of their souls at all less the work of his hands. True, he made use of the will of men: but he first of all implanted that will in them, and then made use of it for the accomplishment of his own most gracious purposes. From first to last "he gave them both to will and to do of his good pleasure," being alike "the Author and the Finisher" of all.

Thus then should we also do for all that is good, whether in ourselves, or others. We should acknowledge him in it, and glorify him for it, and confess, in relation to it all, that "by the grace of God we are what we are."]

2. Of commendation in the Church—

["He gloried of them" in the different Churches where he ministered: for he not only found pleasure in speaking well of them, but he thought it of great utility to the Church of God to hear of the proficiency which others had made; inasmuch as it would stimulate them also to greater exertions, and encourage them to expect greater measures of Divine grace, in order to their own more exalted proficiency. This was the case with respect to the Corinthian Church. St. Paul boasted of them to the Churches in Macedonia, that Achaia had shewn extraordinary readiness in providing for the poor saints in Judea; and, in speaking of this to the Corinthians, he says, "Your zeal hath provoked very many[d]." And so should it be with us. When we look at Prophets and Apostles, we are apt to think that it would be presumptuous to hope for such grace as they possessed: but when we see common individuals, or whole Churches, far exalted above us in every thing that is good, we should be ashamed, and never cease to emulate and rival their attainments.]

3. Of congratulation to themselves—

[These graces, exercised under such peculiar circumstances, were sufficient to demonstrate, that there must be a future state of retribution, where the present inequalities of the Divine procedure should be rectified: they were an evidence too that in that day "*they* should be counted worthy of that kingdom for which they suffered such things." It could not fail, but that in that day a suitable recompence should be given both to themselves and their oppressors: to those "who caused their tribulation, trouble," proportioned to the trouble they had occasioned: but "to those who had endured the trouble, rest," even everlasting rest in the bosom of their God, "with all the Prophets and Apostles" who had endured the same things before them.

Now

[d] 2 Cor. ix. 2.

Now to know this, must be an exceeding great consolation to them under their multiplied afflictions: and therefore he could not but declare to them, that, if they had, on the one hand, so much reason to complain, they had, on the other hand, abundantly more reason to rejoice; since they had, even in these very afflictions, an evidence of their meetness for glory, and a pledge that in due season it should be conferred upon them.]

To *us* also will this account of them be profitable, if we duly consider,

III. What lessons we should learn from it—

Two things it may well teach us:

1. That opposition, how formidable soever it may be, is no excuse for our turning back from God—

[What are our persecutions, in comparison of those which they endured? Yet they were "stedfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord." Should we then be intimidated? Should we hesitate whom to obey, or what course to follow? No: we should take up our cross cheerfully; and having counted the cost, should be content to pay it. The stony-ground hearer, when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, may well draw back, because he has no root in him: but the true disciple will go with his life in his hand, and be willing not only to make minor sacrifices, but even to lay down his life for Christ's sake. We must not imagine that such a line of conduct was necessary for the primitive Christians only: it is equally necessary for Christians in every age: and "he who loves his life shall lose it; and he only who is willing to lose his life for Christ's sake, shall find it unto life eternal."]

2. That whatever proficiency we have made in the Divine life, we should still press forward for higher attainments—

[Certainly the proficiency of the Thessalonians was very eminent, even in the earlier state of their progress; for even then "they were ensamples to all Believers, both in Macedonia and Achaia." But they had not rested in their attainments: they had pressed forward for the highest possible degrees of grace: and through mercy they had attained a most uncommon eminence in the Divine life. So we, if we had advanced as far as St. Paul himself, should, like him, "forget all that was behind, and reach forward to that which was before, and press forward to the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." We should aspire after a perfect resemblance to our Saviour's image; and seek, if possible, so to be poured into the mould of the Gospel, as to have every lineament of our character conformed to it. We should think nothing attained, as long as any thing remained to be attained. We should seek to "grow up into Christ in all things, as

as our Head," and to "be changed into his image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord."]

APPLICATION:—But,

1. How different from the Thessalonian Church are the generality of those who call themselves Christians!

[Many have heard the Gospel to little purpose; or rather, "Our entering in unto them has been altogether in vain[e]." If we look for their works of faith, and labours of love, and patience of hope, as evidences that the word has come to them with power, we find no more, than others have who never heard the Gospel at all. As to a visible growth in these things, there is no symptom of it: they have continued from the beginning even to the present hour nearly the same persons, perfectly satisfied with themselves, and not less unconscious of the need of any change, than unconcerned about it. But let not such persons account themselves Christians indeed; or imagine that they can be thought worthy of that kingdom for which they have never suffered, never laboured, never cared. To such persons the conduct of the Thessalonians, if exhibited before their eyes, would be rather an object of derision than of admiration and love: and consequently they have in themselves "a manifest token," that they have nothing to expect at God's hands, but the measure which they have dealt out to his obedient people. I intreat you, Brethren, consider that in the day of judgment the righteousness of God will be so visibly displayed, as to constrain the whole assembled universe to acknowledge it, as well in those that are saved, as in them that perish. How it can be displayed in the salvation of such as you, judge ye. Mercy, I grant, might be exhibited; but righteousness would find no plea for rewarding you, no justification in your acquittal: for if God be just, there must be a difference put between those who have served him, and those who have served him not,—a difference, which may well make every one of you to tremble.]

2. How diligently should the most exalted amongst you press forward in your heavenly course!

[There is room enough for improvement in every Child of man. Think, Beloved, how much more strong and operative your faith might be; how much more ardent and influential your love; how much more firm and patient your hope. You know but little of yourselves, if you are not daily mourning over your shortcomings and defects. Let all of you then, without exception, seek to "grow in grace:" if you are "children," seek to become "young men;" if you are "young men," seek to become "fathers in Christ:" and if you are fathers, still seek to become more

[e] 1 Thes. ii. 1.

more and more like to Christ, till you "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." If, as is probable, your zeal will provoke the greater opposition against you, welcome it, as "turning to you for a testimony," and as rendering you more like to Him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, and suffered even unto death. So will your meetness for heaven daily increase, and be more fully recognised by your God and Saviour in the last day: and you need never fear but that the recompence which he will bestow, will amply compensate for all that you can do or suffer in this vale of tears.]

MLXXIV.

CHRIST'S COMING TO JUDGE THE WORLD.

2 Thess. i. 7—10. *The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.*

WE cannot behold the state of the world around us, but we must feel a need of some future day of retribution. Multitudes there are, in every place, who are racked with incessant pains, or pining all their days in want and misery; while others, in no respect superior to them in moral qualities, pass their time in ease and affluence. From hence it is reasonable to conclude, that there will be a period, wherein the present inequalities in the dispensations of Providence shall be so adjusted, as to mark more clearly God's regard to equity. If we look into the Church of God, this argument receives additional strength: for there we see the holiest and best of men, men "of whom the world is not worthy," hated, reviled, persecuted; while their proud oppressors exult in their tyranny, and glory in their shame. Can it be imagined that God will never recompense the fidelity of his servants, or notice the impiety of his enemies? Shall religion always suffer? Shall iniquity always triumph? It cannot be. The very existence of such enormities is "a manifest proof," or demonstration, that there will be a "righteous judgment of God," wherein he will shew it to be "a righteous thing with him

him to recompense tribulation to the troublers of his Israel, and rest to the troubled." The mention of this period is introduced by the Apostle in this very view: and, to impress the thought more powerfully on our minds, he describes, in most energetic terms, *the manner* in which our Lord will come to judgment, and *the ends* for which he will come. Let us consider,

I. The manner in which our Lord will come to judgment—

[This, though solemn and instructive, must not occupy much of our attention at this time, because of the superior importance of the latter part of our subject. "The Lord Jesus" is the person that is "ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead[a]." He is at present in heaven, whither he ascended from Mount Olivet, and "where he will continue till the time of the restitution of all things[b]:" but at the appointed time he "will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire." When he first came into the world, his advent was obscure; but at his second coming it will be exceeding glorious. He will be attended with an innumerable host of angels, who, on account of their inconceivable strength and power, are called "mighty;" and who are represented as "*his*" angels, because they were created by him, and are continually employed in his service. At the day of judgment in particular they will be actively engaged, in separating the righteous from the wicked[c], in "binding up, as it were, the wicked in bundles to cast them into the fire" of hell[d], and in "gathering together the elect[e]," in order to their more complete enjoyment of the glory prepared for them. The majesty of his appearance will be greatly increased by his being surrounded with "flaming fire." When formerly he descended on Mount Sinai, "the whole mountain burned with fire," in so awful a manner, that the whole nation of Israel, and even "Moses himself, exceedingly trembled and quaked[f]." But on his future descent from heaven, "his throne will be like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire; and a fiery stream will issue and come forth from before him[g]:" at the same time the earth itself also shall be on fire, the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the whole globe whereon we live shall burst forth in one vast and universal conflagration[h].

How terrible this scene will be, no words can express, no imagination can conceive: but that day is justly characterized as "the great and terrible day of the Lord[i]."]

This

[a] Acts xvii. 31. [b] Acts iii. 21. [c] Matt. xiii. 49.
[d] Matt. xiii. 30, 39. [e] Matt. xxiv. 31.
[f] Exod. xix. 16, 18. with Heb. xii. 21. [g] Dan. vii. 9, 10.
[h] 2 Pet. iii. 10. [i] Joel ii. 11, 31.

This description is doubly awful as connected with,

II. The ends of his coming—

These are,

1. The punishment of the wicked—

[It is commonly thought, that if we be moral in our conduct, we need not trouble ourselves about religious principles. But whom will the Lord punish in that day? the immoral and profane? Yes, doubtless: but shall these be the only monuments of his indignation? No: he will "take vengeance also on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." In these words are comprehended not only the idolatrous Gentiles, and the unbelieving Jews, but all amongst ourselves also who do not *practically know* God, and *unreservedly obey* the Gospel. Theoretical knowledge, or hypocritical profession, will be of no avail: we must FEEL *our obligation to God* as our Benefactor, *our duty towards him* as our Governor, and *our dependence on him* as our Father and our Friend. We must, moreover, EMBRACE the salvation which he has offered us in the Gospel, *trusting* solely *in the merit* of our Redeemer's blood, *living* wholly *on the fulness* that is treasured up for us in him, and *devoting ourselves* entirely *to him*, as his redeemed people.

Would to God this point were sufficiently considered! Brethren, mark attentively the declaration in the text, and then see what becomes of those presumptuous sentiments which are so confidently asserted, and so generally received. See whether morality be all: see whether you are at liberty to disregard the Gospel: see whether the principles of Christianity are of so little consequence, that you may be saved without them: see whether that obedience to the Gospel, which is derided as fanaticism, be a matter of indifference, or deserving of the odium cast upon it. Ah! be assured that, whatever the ungodly world may say or think, all they who do not truly *know* God, and cordially *obey* the Gospel, shall perish for ever[k].]

Nor let it be thought that the punishment of such persons shall be light, or of short duration. The Apostle enlarges on the idea, in order to fix it more deeply in our minds. Such persons shall be banished "from the presence of the Lord," and from all the bright displays of his power and glory." Nor shall they merely suffer this *loss* (though that were inexpressibly dreadful): they shall also be exposed to *pain* and anguish, such as God alone can inflict, and such as would destroy their very existence, if the same power that inflicted it did not uphold them under it. To this punishment there shall be no end, no mitigation, no intermission: it will be "everlasting:" they will have "no rest day or night; and the smoke of their torment will ascend up for ever

[k] 1 Pet. iv. 17.

ever and ever[l]." The Judge himself will pronounce this sentence on them, "DEPART from me, ye accursed, into *everlasting* fire, prepared for the devil and his angels[m]."]

2. The salvation of the righteous—

[As the honour of God is pledged for the condemnation of the wicked, so is it also involved in the happiness of the righteous. But who are the righteous? Mark the description given of them in the text: they are "the saints," and "those who believe." Here then again let infidels and scoffers read their doom: the people, the only people that shall be saved, are they who *believe* in Christ, and are *sanctified* by his Spirit. Let the term "*Saints*" or "*Believers*" be used as expressions of contempt: the time is coming, when they who are worthy of those names shall be held in different estimation, and receive a juster recompence.

The Saviour, at his coming, shall be "glorified and admired *by* them." *Now* he appears exceeding glorious in their eyes, even "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely[n];" and *now* he is the one object of their love, their praise, their glorying[o]: but, *in that day*, how will they be filled with wonder at the sight of him! How will they admire his sovereign grace, that chose them from the midst of an ungodly world; his love, that undertook to save them by his own blood; his patience, that bore with them under all their backslidings; his power, that kept them amidst so many enemies; his faithfulness, that accomplished to them so many promises! How will they adore his wisdom and goodness, in every one of his dispensations towards them! And how will the countless multitudes of the redeemed unite in one universal chorus, singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain;" "Salvation to our God, and to the Lamb, for ever!"

Then also will the Saviour be glorified and admired *in* them. While they were in this world, they shined as lights in it, and were "his epistles, known and read of all men."

But how will he be glorified in them in that day, when all their unworthiness shall be contrasted with his goodness, and the work that he has wrought in them shall fully appear! If, in beholding a curious work, we begin to admire the artist, how will he be admired when all the millions of his redeemed shall stand together, all of them "his workmanship" transformed from the image of the devil into the very image of their God! How will the virtue of his sacrifice, the prevalence of his intercession, the efficacy of his grace, and all the wonders of his love, then appear! When all, without exception, shall ascribe their salvation to him, how, I say, will he be admired *in* all, and glorified *by* all!

For this end then will he come, as well as to condemn the wicked:

[l] Rev. xiv. 11.
[m] Matt. xxv. 41. Mark ix. 43—48.
[n] Cant. v. 10, 16.
[o] Isai. xlv. 25. 1 Pet. i. 8.

wicked: he will come to consummate the happiness of his saints, by discovering to them fully his own unveiled glory, and by putting upon them such a measure of his glory as their diversified capacities shall enable them to bear.]

INFER,

1. How studious should we be to *obtain* the knowledge of the Gospel—

[It cannot be too often repeated, that our salvation depends on our "*obeying* the Gospel of Christ:" yea, there is the greater necessity to repeat it, because men are so riveted to the idea, that morality is all. But before we suffer ourselves to be thus deceived, let us contemplate the inevitable consequences of yielding to that delusion: Perish we must, as sure as God is true. Read but the text, and judge for yourselves. If it be the word of *man*, reject it; and suffer nobody to disturb your peace: but if it be the word of *God*, remember that neither you nor all the world can alter it. And let the recollection of what is there spoken dwell upon your minds, till it have brought you to the foot of the cross, and "determined you to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified."]

2. How earnest should we be in *diffusing* the knowledge of the Gospel—

[If we have spoken strongly on this subject, we have done so, because we believe the declaration in the text, and are convinced that they who now deny or disregard it, will find it true to their cost. Does not then this earnestness become us? If you were in as imminent danger with respect to your bodily life, as you are with respect to your souls, should we not be inexcusable if we neglected to warn you, and to warn you with all earnestness? Surely, if all Ministers felt the importance of these truths, they would "cry aloud, and not spare." If we had a due concern for the welfare of others, there would also be a greater readiness amongst us to go unto the Heathen, and to shew unto them the way of salvation. Would a few trials or difficulties discourage us, if we considered the benefit that would accrue to our perishing fellow-creatures, or the recompence which we ourselves should in due time receive?

Beloved Brethren, let us not fear the face of man; let us not regard a few scoffs or reproaches for the Lord's sake; let us not be backward to endure hardness as good soldiers: but let us look unto the end of all things; when the state of all shall be fixed in perfect correspondence with their present characters and conduct, and every individual in the universe receive a just "recompence of reward."]

MLXXV.

MEETNESS FOR HEAVEN DESIRED.

2 Thess. i. 11, 12. *We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

VARIOUS are the offices of Christian love; but none more valuable than that of intercession. In all its personal efforts, it communicates only such benefits as a creature can bestow: but in its applications to God in the behalf of any one, it brings down all the blessings of grace and glory. We say not indeed that intercession must of necessity prevail to the full extent of the blessings asked, or for every individual in whose behalf they are solicited: but they do prevail to a far greater extent than we are apt to imagine: and we know of nothing wherein love can exercise itself so profitably, as in frequent and fervent supplications to God for the object beloved. St. Paul's love was of no common cast: in fact, it knew no bounds: the sacrifice of life itself was welcomed by him, if it might but subserve the interests of immortal souls. In his prayers for them, there is a richness and fulness which marked at once the ardour of his mind, the depth of his knowledge, and the enlargement of his heart. No petition he could offer seemed sufficient to express the full extent of his desires. This appears in many of his prayers: and it is abundantly evident in that which we have selected for our consideration at this time.

Three things we must distinctly notice;

I. The great object which he desired in their behalf—

This was, that they might find acceptance with God in the day of judgment—

[Of that day he is speaking in the preceding context: and he declares, that a sweet "rest" in the bosom of their God will be the portion of all who have approved themselves faithful to him under all their trials. This is the "calling" of which he speaks, and which he so designates, because it is the object to which

which Believers are called: "They are called unto God's eternal glory by Christ Jesus[a]."

Of this calling he prays that they may "be counted worthy." What is the import of this expression, may be seen in the foregoing context, where it evidently refers, not to any *merit* in man, whereby he shall be justified before God, but to that *meetness* for heaven which shall serve to illustrate and display the equity of the Judge in his final decisions. The day of judgment is appointed not altogether for the purpose of awarding to men their proper doom; (for that, in reference to the soul at least, is adjudged to every one at the instant of his death:) it is rather appointed for the displaying before the whole assembled universe the righteousness of God in his dealings with the children of men; on which account it is called "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God[b]:" and the description given of that day in the preceding context particularly presents it to us in that view. We say then, that "the being accounted worthy" of that calling refers to the meetness of the soul for the participation of it: and the petition thus expressed, must be understood to this effect: "I pray, that in the last day you may be found to have possessed such a character, to have maintained such a conduct in this world, as shall "*be an evident token of the righteous judgment of God*," when he shall assign to you the everlasting possession of "his kingdom" and glory[c].

We have dwelt the more carefully on this, that we might cut off all occasion for mistake respecting the Apostle's meaning in the text, throughout the whole of which he most determinately marks the whole of our salvation as altogether of grace.]

Taking the petition then in this sense, we ask, Is it not such a petition as we are all concerned to offer both for ourselves and others?

[Who can reflect on the solemnities of that day, who can think of the discoveries which will then be brought to light, and the unexpected sentences that will be then awarded, and not earnestly desire, both for himself and for all who are dear to him, that the sentence which God shall pass on them may be one of approbation, and not of condemnation? I pray you, Brethren, lay to heart this infinitely important subject; and never cease to pour out your souls before God, that you and yours may find acceptance before him in that day — — —]

In his further petitions for this object, he specifies,

II. The means by which he expected it to be accomplished—

[He considers the work as altogether of grace, in its origin, its

[a] 1 Pet. v. 10. [b] Rom. ii. 5. [c] See ver. 5.

its progress, its consummation. God, in his infinite "goodness," has ordained that his people shall possess such a measure of piety, as shall render them fully meet for the enjoyment of his presence and glory in the eternal world: and in reference both to the persons who shall possess it, and the measure in which they shall partake of it, he has exercised "his good pleasure," disposing of all according to his own inscrutable purposes, and the eternal counsel of his own will[d]. This good pleasure the Apostle desired might "be fulfilled in them" by the mighty working of God's power, calling forth into activity the faith he had bestowed, and giving it a more transforming efficacy upon their souls.

It is in this way, and this way alone, that the Divine life is carried on and perfected. It is by the production of faith in the soul that the soul begins to live: it is by the exercise of that faith that the soul is enabled to do and suffer what God requires: and it is by the augmentation of that faith that the soul is perfected after the Divine image. It is faith which realizes the things that are invisible to mortal eyes, and gives to futurity a present existence[e]. It is the one principle in the soul, by which all its energies are called forth, and all its efforts are made effectual. The whole eleventh chapter to the Hebrews proves and illustrates this; and shews with what wisdom, as well as piety, the Apostle poured out his supplications before God.]

We shall not wonder at his desiring this great object, if we notice,

III. The end which he foresaw was to be accomplished by it—

Then "will the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be glorified in them—"

[Even in this world he is glorified in and by his saints, as he himself has expressly declared[f]. But the Apostle has respect rather to that day, wherein Christ will "come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe[g]." Verily he will then be glorified in them. In what bright colours will then the whole assembled universe behold the virtue of his sacrifice, and the efficacy of his grace, and his fidelity to all his promises! Of those that have been given him by the Father, not one will be lost[h]: not one will be found to have been ever "plucked out of his hands[i]." What hosannahs will resound to him from all the hosts of the redeemed, all singing, "To Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and our Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever; Amen!"]

Then will the saints also be "glorified in him"—

[Already,

[d] Eph. i. 5, 9, 11.
[e] Heb. xi. 1.
[f] John xvii. 10.
[g] 2 Ver. 10.
[h] John xvii. 12.
[i] John x. 28.

[Already, as members, do they participate in the glory of their Head, "in and with whom they are already sitting, as it were, in heavenly places:" they may be considered also as already glorified in and with him, in that they are placed by him as a city set on a hill, and made both the salt of the earth, and the lights of a dark world. But in that day their glory will be complete: for they shall then be "like him," even in his perfect image, and be acknowledged by him in the presence of his Father and his holy angels, as his peculiar people, the purchase of his blood, the fruit of his travail, the jewels of his crown. Then shall all that is his, be theirs: his crown, his throne, his kingdom, his glory, all will be theirs, their inalienable property, their everlasting possession.]

Then too will all the wonders of God's covenant, and the purposes of his grace, be unravelled and complete—

[All will then be seen to have been "according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ;" between whom all was concerted from eternity: "The counsel of peace," says the Prophet, "was between them both[k]." What wonder will not the developement of these stupendous mysteries excite throughout all the regions of the blessed; and to what songs of praise will it not give rise, through the never-ending ages of eternity!———

Contemplate these things, the object desired, the means by which it was to be effected, and the wonderful ends to be attained by it; and this prayer will be found no less instructive to the mind, than it is reviving and refreshing to the soul.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have no experience of the things here prayed for—

[How many are at this moment ignorant of "the work of faith," and of that "Divine power" with which it operates in the soul! How many are altogether strangers to the idea of Christ being glorified in them, or their being glorified in him, or of the eternal purposes of God's grace being displayed in them! Little have such persons known of true religion: they even "need to be taught the very first principles of the Oracles of God." Oh, Brethren, the Gospel is not such a meagre thing as you make it: it is a wonderful display of God's mercy and grace in the redemption of a ruined world: and, wherever it is received aright, it will fill the soul with such views and such desires as are expressed in our text. Do not, I beseech you, continue ignorant of these things: for, if you know them not, or feel not their influence, how shall you stand accepted at the judgment-seat of Christ? It will

[k] Zech. vi. 13.

will be too late to commence your inquiries then: they must be begun now: yea, you must now glorify Christ by a life of faith in this world, if ever you are to be glorified with him in the world to come.]

2. Those whose prayers and intercessions accord with those of the holy Apostle—

[Doubtless there are many amongst you whose hearts go forth with the petitions in our text; and who shall ultimately experience all that our text unfolds. But, in order to this desirable end, we recommend to all to consider the strictness of the scrutiny at that day. Verily, the Judge, as he himself tells us, has "eyes like a flame of fire:" and he "tries the very hearts and reins, in order to give to every man according to his works[1]." It will be to little purpose to be "accounted worthy" by your fellow-creatures, if you be not so accounted by your God: and it must not be forgotten, that there are many who "have a name to live, whilst" yet, in reality, "they are dead." Oh, dread lest that should prove your state at the last: and be earnest with God in prayer, that he would "fulfil in you *all* the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power." Be satisfied with nothing short of this. Aspire after the highest possible attainments, that the Lord Jesus Christ may even now be glorified in you, and that your meetness for his glory may be conspicuous in the eyes of all. So shall your intercessions prevail for others also; and in that great day when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, you shall shine forth as the sun in the firmament for ever and ever.]

[1] Rev. ii. 18, 23.

MLXXVI.

THE SALVATION OF MEN TRACED TO ITS PROPER SOURCE.

2 Thess. ii. 13, 14. *We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

MUCH as the heart of man rises against the doctrine of election, it must be confessed that it occurs very frequently in the holy Scriptures; and therefore it ought not to be passed over in silence: and, if the

advocates

advocates of that doctrine would be contented to state it as the holy Scriptures state it, and to give it only that measure of prominence which it bears in the Inspired Writings, I cannot but think that much of the prejudice against it would subside. It is true, that nothing but deep humility of mind can ever lead a man so to acquiesce in it as to approve of it in his soul, and to adorn it in his life. But where that humility exists, as it did in the apostle Paul, the doctrine will be most grateful to the soul, and will form a ground of most unfeigned praise to Almighty God. The Apostle is contrasting the state of the Thessalonians with that of many who should, at a future period, arise in the Church, whose presumption would know no bounds, and who for their impiety would be given over by God to final impenitence. Whilst those transgressors were doomed by God to everlasting misery, the Thessalonian converts were ordained to eternal life, having been from the beginning chosen of God to salvation, and having been in time called to the enjoyment of it through the ministry of that Gospel which the Apostle preached. For them therefore he gives thanks, as indeed he was bound to do, since it was a mercy that called for the devoutest praises and thanksgivings, from themselves and from all others in their behalf.

The grounds of his thanksgiving are,

I. Their election of God to the blessings of salvation—

In his thanksgiving he distinctly specifies,

1. The *end* to which they were elected—

[It was "salvation," even "the salvation that was in Christ Jesus with eternal glory[a]." It was not to the means of salvation merely; for many enjoyed the means of salvation, on whose behalf he could not give thanks, yea, on whose account "he had continual heaviness and sorrow in his heart:" it was to salvation itself, with all its inconceivable and everlasting blessings that they were chosen[b]; and *this* too, not merely from the beginning of the period when the Gospel was preached to them, or that they began to listen to it, but "from before the foundation of the world[c]."

From hence it appears, that there is, and ever has been, "a remnant according to the election of grace[d]," unknown indeed to man,

[a] 2 Tim. ii. 10. [b] 1 Thess. v. 9.
Eph. i. 4. 2 Tim. i. 9. [c] Rom. xi. 5.

man, but known to God, and from all eternity given by him to his Son, to be the purchase of his blood, and the partners of his glory[e].]

2. The *means* by which that end is to be attained—

[The great argument against the doctrine of Election is, that if we are elect, we shall be saved, even though we live in all manner of sin; and that if we be not elect, we cannot be saved, even though we live the most holy and blameless life. But that argument, especially the former part of it, is most effectually answered: for God has ordained the means as well as the end: and he has ordained the end no otherwise than by and through the appointed means. God decreed to add fifteen years to the life of Hezekiah: but did this supersede the necessity of his subsisting by daily food? Yet the use of food is not so inseparably connected with the animal life as holiness is with the life of the soul: for Elijah lived forty days, and Moses twice forty days, without food; and God, if he had pleased, might have supported Hezekiah fifteen years without it: but he *cannot* save a man without holiness, because *he has declared he will not*; and "he *cannot* lie," "he *cannot* deny himself:" and therefore to expect to attain salvation in any other way than that which is here ordained, is to expect from God what he has never promised, and what, so far from having ever ordained, *he has ordained shall never come to pass:* for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

God had chosen them to salvation "through sanctification of the Spirit." Sanctification is necessary for the enjoyment of heaven. Heaven would afford no happiness to an unsanctified soul. The presence of a holy God would inspire nothing but terror: and an unintermitted engagement in holy exercises would be an insupportable burthen to one who had no taste for them. God therefore has connected sanctification with salvation, in order that the soul on its exaltation to glory may possess a meetness for the enjoyment of it. And, that his people may be sanctified, he sends down his Holy "Spirit" into their souls; and, by the same power whereby he raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, raises them from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness. Thus by transforming them into his own image, he fits them for his glory.

Further; he had chosen them to salvation "through a belief of the truth." It is by faith, and by faith alone, that we apprehend the blessings of salvation. By faith we lay hold on the promises of God: by faith we become united to Christ: by faith we bring down from Christ all those supplies of grace which are necessary for us in this state of warfare. We should fall and perish instantly, if we were not armed with "faith, as our shield;" and

[e] John xvii. 6, 9, 10, 22, 24.

and "hope, as our helmet;" and "the word, as the sword," whereby the Spirit of God enables us to inflict a deadly wound on our enemies. It was by holding fast the written word, that Jesus triumphed over Satan in the wilderness: and by a constant reliance on the word are we also to overcome him. Hence God had ordained for them, as he has for all his people, that they shall attain salvation "through belief of the truth."

Thus are faith and holiness inseparably connected with salvation: and to them are men elected, as much as to salvation itself: so that to hope for heaven in any other way than through a perseverance in these, is an unwarrantable presumption, and will only deceive our own souls.

Whilst the Apostle traces thus all the blessings of salvation to God's electing love as their true and only source, he reminds his Thessalonian converts of,

II. Their effectual calling by his Ministry to a participation of them—

It is by the word that God imparts his blessings to the souls of men—

[It is by the word that God acts. As far as his providence concurs in the salvation of men, it is only in subserviency to the word[f]. The word is "the rod of his strength," by which all the wonders of his grace are wrought. Miracles gave credibility to the testimony which Christ and his Apostles bore: but it was the testimony itself, as applied by the Holy Spirit to the soul, that wrought effectually upon the hearts of men. And in all ages it is the same word, either read or preached, that is effectual to convert them to God. Hence the Apostle reminds the Thessalonians that, notwithstanding they were from eternity chosen of God to salvation, they were "called" to the possession of it through the Ministry of the Gospel which he had preached unto them.]

Wherever that word is received aright, it will operate effectually to the desired end—

[Thus it had wrought on the Thessalonians: it had "turned them from idols to serve the living God[g]." And thus it will work on all who cordially embrace it[h]. "It is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword[i]." "It is mighty to the pulling down of all the strong-holds of sin and Satan[k]." "It invariably accomplishes that which God has pleased, and prospers in the thing whereunto he has sent it[l]." It is the instrument whereby God fulfils his eternal counsels in the conversion of men. When the time fixed by him for the bringing home of his wandering sheep

[f] Acts viii. 26—40. & ix. 1—24.
[g] 1 Thess. i. 5, 9. [h] Col. i. 6. [i] Heb. iv. 12.
[k] 2 Cor. x. 4. [l] Isai. lv. 10, 11.

sheep is arrived, "he apprehends them" by his word[m], and brings them home with power to his fold, constraining them by his grace, and "making them willing in the day of his power[n]." This is his invariable process towards them: "Whom he has predestinated, those he first calls, and then justifies, and then glorifies[o]:" he brings them not to the profession of the Gospel merely, but "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ[p]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have never yet obeyed "the Gospel call"—

[Who these are may be easily ascertained: they have been "called" to a "belief of the truth," even such a belief as should lead them to rely entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation; "and to the sanctification of the Spirit," even such a sanctification as should progressively transform them into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness———and, if you have not these marks upon you———you are the persons whom I now address.

Say not ye, 'I am not of God's elect, and therefore I cannot help myself.' No: ye shall not thus cast the blame of your condemnation upon God. Who has told you, that you are not of God's elect? Who has searched the book of God's decrees, or been told by God that your name is not inserted there? Then you have no right whatever to conclude that you are not elect of God, or to make his supposed decrees any excuse for continuance in sin. On the contrary, I am authorised by almighty God to declare, that "he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live[q]." "He would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth[r]." He even confirms this truth with an oath: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O House of Israel[s]?" The truth is, as our Lord informs us; "Ye will not come unto me," saith he, "that ye might have life." "Him that should come unto me I would in no wise cast out." Know ye then that the fault is yours, and not God's. Our Lord complains over you, "How often *would I* have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but *ye would not!*" Yes; whatever excuses you may now make from the doctrine of election, your mouths shall be stopped in the day of judgment: "*I would*, but *ye would not*." Do not reply, that, till God has given you his grace, you cannot come to Christ: for, if you would only attempt in faith to stretch out your withered hand, in the very

[m] Phil. iii. 12. [n] Ps. cx. 3. [o] Rom. viii. 30.
[p] Text. [q] 2 Pet. iii. 9. [r] 1 Tim. ii. 4.
[s] Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

very attempt he would enable you to do it[t]. Now then, in the name of almighty God, I call you to him, and invite you to receive freely at his hands all the blessings of salvation[u]———— And, if ye will not obey the call, your blood shall be upon your own heads.]

2. Those who through grace have obeyed the call—

[Remember, Brethren, "who it is that hath made you to differ[x]." Ye are "beloved of the Lord." "Ye have not chosen him; but he has chosen you, and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit; and that your fruit should remain[y]." "Ye love him because he first loved you[z]:" "He loved you with an everlasting love; and therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn you[a]." "He loved you," not for any good that he either saw, or foresaw, in you; but simply of his own will, "because he would love you[b]." Say then, Whether ye have not reason to thank your God; or rather, whether your every breath should not be an effusion of praise?

But forget not that the path by which alone you can arrive at your desired home is that of faith and holiness. This is the king's "highway[c]," by a patient continuance in which you are to "obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Hold fast then the faith without wavering;" and pray constantly to God for fresh "supplies of his Spirit," that you may be sanctified throughout, and "be changed into his image from grace to grace, and from glory to glory." Meditate deeply and continually on his word, and treasure it up in your hearts, that you may be "sanctified by the truth[d]:" and ever remember, that to the very last it is by the word that the Lord Jesus Christ will perfect his good work within you[e]. Thus, whilst "those who loved unrighteousness, and were *therefore* given over to a delusion to believe a lie," are left to the "damnation" which their own sins have merited[f], you shall have all the purposes of God's electing love completed in you, and shall spend an eternity in singing praises "to Him who loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood, and hath made you kings and priests unto your God for ever and ever[g]."]

[t] Matt. xii. 13. [u] Isai. lv. 1—3. [x] 1 Cor. iv. 7.
[y] John xv. 16. [z] 1 John iv. 19. [a] Jer. xxxi. 3.
[b] Deut. vii. 7, 8. [c] Isai. xxxv. 8. [d] John xvii 17.
[e] Eph. v. 25—27. [f] ver. 10—12. [g] Rev. i. 5, 6.

MLXXVII.

THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL.

2 Thess. iii. 1. *Finally, Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you.*

THE light of the material sun is hailed and welcomed by every nation under heaven: but how much more is the light of the Sun of Righteousness to be desired! If the one be necessary for our comfort in this life, the other is necessary to guide us in the way to life eternal. Hence the Apostle not only laboured to spread the Gospel himself, but endeavoured to interest all the Lord's people in its behalf; that by their united supplications they might obtain from God whatever should conduce to its establishment in the world.

In this request of his we see,

I. What we should desire for the word of God—

1. That it should "have free course"—

[It is surprising that any should be averse to the circulation of the Scriptures; or should be jealous of the Scriptures, unless accompanied with human compositions to forestall and determine the judgment of the reader. What is this but to determine the judgment of the reader? What is this, but to return to Popery? The Papists locked up the Scriptures in an unknown tongue, and forbad the laity to read them; and sent forth among the people small portions of them only, and counteracted those portions by the most erroneous comments and grossest superstitions. Far be such conduct from Protestants: freely have we received, and freely we should give: nor should we relax our efforts to disseminate the Scriptures, till every human Being shall have them in his possession, and be enabled to read in his own native language the wonderful works of God [a].]

2. That it should "be glorified"—

[What is implied in this expression, we are at no loss to determine. We have only to see how it was glorified "*with them*," i. e. the Thessalonian converts, and we have the perfect model of its being glorified amongst ourselves.

In two ways is the word of God glorified; first, *in the conversion of sinners;* and, next, *in the edification and salvation of saints.*

How the Gospel wrought to *the conversion* of the Thessalonians, we are distinctly informed; They received it, "not as the word of man, but as the word of God:" it "came to *them*, not in word only, but in power;" and by it "they were turned from idols to serve the living God [b]"———Similar effects were produced by it in other Churches [c]———And who must not confess that the word is glorified when such wonders are wrought by it?———

But

[a] See Ps. xix 4. & Rom. x. 18.
[b] 1 Thess. i. 5, 9. & ii. 13.
[c] Acts vi. 7. & xix. 20.

But that it is so, is expressly affirmed by the voice of inspiration itself[d].

Nor was the Gospel less powerful for their continued *edification*. This was greatly advanced among them, as the Apostle himself bore witness[e]———Yet nothing but the pure word of God was, or could be, effectual for this end[f]. As the rod of Moses wrought all those miracles in Egypt and the wilderness, so was the Gospel "the rod of God's strength:" and in the production of such miraculous events, both the word itself, and God in it, were greatly glorified[g]: nor is it possible to see such effects yet produced in the hearts and lives of men, without acknowledging, that "he who hath wrought them to the self-same thing is God[h]."———]

Let us next inquire—

II. How that desire is to be obtained—

The Apostle speaks of himself and all his fellow-labourers, as instruments whereby the Gospel was propagated throughout the world. And the same is true of Ministers in all succeeding ages, even to the present day: they are God's Ambassadors to a rebellious world. But the prayers of God's people are no less necessary than the efforts of his Ministers: for it is God alone than can give effect to any exertions; and it is prayer alone that can interest him in our behalf—

[It is God alone that can raise up Ministers, or fit them for the work[i]———Hence we are directed to "pray that *God would send forth* labourers into his harvest[k]."

It is God alone that can open places for them to labour in. Men universally of themselves reject the Gospel: but when God opens a door for his servants, no attempts of his enemies can shut it[l]———

It is God alone that can give success to their endeavours. That same divine power, which first opened the understandings of the Apostles, must open the hearts of others to attend to them[m]——— And then only does the word effect any radical change in men, when it comes "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power[n]."

Hence St. Paul so earnestly intreated the prayers of the Thessalonian Church, and yet more earnestly the intercessions of the saints

[d] Acts xiii. 48, 49.
[e] 2 Thess. i. 3, 4. & ii. 13, 14.
[f] 1 Pet. ii. 2.
[g] Acts xxi. 19, 20.
[h] 2 Cor. v. 5.
[i] Rom. x. 15. & 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. & iii. 5.
[k] Matt. ix. 38. Eph. iv. 12, 13.
[l] Acts xviii. 10, 11. 1 Cor. xvi. 9. & Rev. iii. 8.
[m] Luke xxiv. 45. with Acts xvi. 14.
[n] 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5. & iii. 5—7.

saints at Rome [o]. God has in mercy made his servants and his people mutually dependent on each other: the people being quickened by the exertions of their Ministers; and Ministers being strengthened by the prayers of their people: and thus the builders and the building are advanced together, and all are edified in love.]

We CONCLUDE this subject with,

1. A word of admonition—

[Many profess a reverence for the Bible, and even display a zeal for conveying the holy Scriptures to Heathen lands, who yet make but little use of it for themselves. But this zeal for the good of others will never be admitted as a substitute for personal religion ——— Many of the religious world also, who study the Bible and profess to love the Gospel of Christ, are far from adorning that Gospel by holy tempers, and by heavenly lives ——— Let such persons look well to themselves; for "not he that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of our Father which is in heaven" ———]

2. A word of encouragement—

[Let any one see what was effected in the days of old by a few poor fishermen; and take courage to exert himself for God ——— The same power that wrought effectually in that day will concur with us ——— Let us not then despond, as though our weakness were any obstacle to success; for God will display his own power by means of it [p], and "ordain strength in the mouths of babes and sucklings." Whether therefore we address ourselves to the translation of the Scriptures into foreign languages, or labour for the circulation of them at home, let us only implore help from God, and we shall not be permitted to "labour in vain, or run in vain."]

[o] Rom. xv. 30—32. [p] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

MLXXVIII.

ST. PAUL'S BENEVOLENCE.

2 Thess. iii. 5. *The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.*

IT might well be expected that the fundamental doctrines of our religion should be found, not only in passages where the truths were expressly insisted on, but in others where they were casually introduced. Accordingly we find this to be the case respecting every important doctrine of the Gospel; but in none more than

than that which relates to a Trinity of persons in the Godhead. If we wished to convince an Unbeliever, we should doubtless select such passages as most plainly contain the doctrine in question[a]: but to confirm the mind of a Believer, we should rather refer to places where it was only incidentally mentioned: because, if once we see that the idea was familiar to the minds of the Inspired Writers, and to the minds of those to whom they wrote, we have the strongest proof of which any doctrine is capable. Thus, in the passage before us, the Apostle meant only to express a benevolent wish on behalf of the Church at Thessalonica: but he expressed it in such terms as a person habituated to the doctrine of the Trinity would naturally use: he prayed that "the *Lord* (the Spirit) would direct their hearts into the love of *God* (the Father), and into the patient waiting for *Christ*[b]."

The point however to which we would direct your attention, is not so much the terms in which the Apostle's wish is conveyed, as the *objects* and *reasons* of that wish.

I. The objects of that wish—

A very little observation of the world is sufficient to convince us, that "the love of God" is not the predominant passion of mankind; nor a preparation for Christ's second coming, their chief employment.

[Men in general are not so impressed with a view of God's excellency, as to feel any love to him: much less have they obtained such an acquaintance with him, as to enjoy in their souls any sense of his love to them. Nor is there much of "the patience of Christ[b]" to be found amongst them. To "deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow him," is a lesson which they have never learned. As for looking forward with comfort to the second coming of their Lord, and waiting patiently for it as the completion of their hopes and the consummation of their joys, they know it not. "Their affections are set on things below, rather than on things above;" and the acquisition of some earthly good is that which alone engages their attention ———]

But to possess the state of mind described in the text, is essential to the Christian character—

[How can a man be a Christian, and not love his God? or

[a] e. g. Matt. xxviii. 19. 2 Cor. xiii. 14. [b] ὑπομονὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

or how can he belong to Christ, and not resemble him, "who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God?"———]

Yet of ourselves we never shall, or can, attain to it—

[The heart is altogether averse to spiritual exercises; and turns away in disgust from the contemplation of those things which make for our everlasting peace. If we try to fix our minds on the love of God to man, or on the nature and extent of that obedience which we owe to him, or on the solemn account which we must give of ourselves before him, we cannot long keep our attention to such subjects, nor can we get them suitably impressed upon our hearts———]

Hence St. Paul prayed, that "the Lord, even the Holy Spirit, would direct the hearts of his people into that state—

[It is the province of that divine Agent to give *a right direction*[c] to the heart[d]——— But his influence must be sought by prayer. Nevertheless God will hear also the intercessions of others in our behalf, and give us a supply of his Spirit in answer to them[e]——— In the full persuasion of this, St. Paul poured out the benevolent aspiration which we have been considering.]

Such then were the objects of the Apostle's wish; namely, that the Thessalonian Christians might experience more deeply the truths they professed. Nor are we at any loss so state,

II. The reasons of it—

Among the most important of these were doubtless the two following: he knew that the attainment of such a state was,

1. Highly conducive to their present happiness—

[There is a most absurd prejudice against religion, that it tends to make persons melancholy. That some religious persons are inclined to melancholy, is true enough: but it is not true, that religion makes them so. In all human probability they would have manifested the same disposition (as thousands of others do) if they had never known any thing of religion. As far as religion is concerned, it is from erroneous and distorted views of religion, and not from any just apprehensions of it, that they are rendered melancholy. Where, in all the word of God, do we find this effect ascribed to religion, or arising from it? Peter wept bitterly, and Judas hanged himself? but was it religion, or sin, that was the occasion

[c] κατευθύναι. [d] Jam. i. 17. 2 Cor. v. 5. [e] Phil. i. 19.

occasion of their sorrows? not religion surely, but sin. Religion was a balm to Peter, and kept him from despair; and it was Judas's want of religion that drove him to suicide.

But the truth is, that men make this a mere pretext to reject religion: they do not really, in their hours of sober reflection, think that religion has any such tendency. Where will be found a man in the whole universe who really thinks that love to God, or a sense of God's love to him, would make him less happy? ——— Where is there one who really believes that an habitual preparation for death and judgment would make him less happy? ——— Nay, where is there one who does not in his heart envy a truly pious character, and entertain the secret wish, O that I might be found in that man's place at the day of judgment! ———

The Apostle knew that the graces which he desired for the Thessalonian Christians would make them truly happy both in life and death. He knew it from the universal tenor of the holy Scriptures[f] ——— and he knew it from his own experience[g] ——— and therefore he prayed the Lord to direct their hearts to the attainment of them.]

2. Indispensably necessary to their eternal welfare—

[What is a Christian without the love of God? What pretensions has he to the name of Christian? ——— or how can he call himself a disciple of Christ, who has no delight in following his steps, or in looking forward to his future advent? What an appearance will such an one make at the tribunal of his Judge? Will he not be ashamed before him at his coming! Has he any reason to think that the God whom he never loved will love him? or that the Saviour whom he never served will say to him, Well done, good and faithful servant? Whatever they may say to the contrary, the careless world have their misgivings even now; they have a secret fear that God will put a difference between those who served him and those who served him not ——— On this subject St. Paul had no doubt ——— and therefore, "knowing the terrors of the Lord, he both persuaded men" to seek these necessary attainments, and implored of God to communicate to them all needful supplies of his Spirit and grace.]

APPLICATION—

Permit me now to express the same benevolent wish respecting you—

[We have no wish to proselyte men to a party, or to lead them into any enthusiastic notions or pursuits. All we desire is, that they should love that God who has so loved them, and be found patiently waiting for the Bridegroom when he shall call them to the marriage. And, I ask, is this unreasonable? Is it any thing more than what I ought to wish; or than you yourselves either do,

[f] Ps. lxiii. 5. Matt. v. 3—12. [g] 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

do, or will soon, wish for yourselves?———Be not offended, then, if we express this wish: be not offended if we urge upon you what we know will tend so much to your present happiness, and what we are assured is necesssary to your happiness in the future world———]

Let me also request that you will adopt this wish for yourselves—

[Surely I shall have spoken to good effect, if only one amongst you all shall be stirred up to pray for himself, "Lord, direct *my* heart into the love of God, and into a patient waiting for Christ." Happy will it be, if any of you begin to wish that you had loved God, and that you might from this time become objects of his favour. Happy will it be, if any of you begin to say, 'I will take up my cross and follow Christ: I will follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach. He died for me; O that I might have grace to live and die for him! He is coming to judge me; O that I might be ready for his appearing, and give up my account to him with joy and not with grief!'———Cultivate these desires: beg of God to stir them up in your hearts by his Holy Spirit: and when you have attained a measure of this grace yourselves, cultivate it to the utmost in the hearts of others.]

MLXXIX.

PAUL'S CONVERSION.

1 Tim. i. 16. *For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.*

THE first question that should occur to our minds, is this, Have I obtained mercy? If a favourable answer can be returned to that, we should inquire, In what manner, and for what ends, mercy has been shewn us? There can be no doubt, but that if persons who are converted to God would frequently look back upon the state in which they were previous to their conversion, they would find the retrospect attended with the most beneficial consequences. Their recollection would furnish them with innumerable facts, which would tend to humble them in the dust, and to excite adoring thoughts of that grace which has so distinguished them. St. Paul appears to have taken peculiar pleasure in this

this exercise of mind. He embraces every opportunity to speak of his former hostility to Christ, in order to exalt to the uttermost the honour of that God, by whom he had been elected, redeemed, and sanctified. In the preceding verses he had expatiated on this painful subject: and now he improves it for the benefit of others.

In discoursing on his words, we shall notice,

I. The circumstances under which the Apostle obtained mercy—

If St. Paul had more to boast of than any, on account of his birth, his education, his strictness, and his zeal, he had also more to be humbled for than almost any other person. For consider,

1. His ignorance of himself—

[He had been educated under the most celebrated teacher of his day, Gamaliel; and had made a proficiency beyond any of his age. Yet, skilled as he was in Rabbinical learning, he was wholly ignorant of his own *state* and *character*. He knew not that he was a condemned sinner. He knew not the spirituality and extent of the law. He had no idea that it required perfect unsinning obedience, and consigned men over to perdition for one single offence, whether in thought, word, or deed. Through his ignorance of the law, he imagined himself to be "alive," and entitled to everlasting life[a]. He moreover judged that he was practising all the moral duties, while he was destitute of almost every just sentiment, or proper feeling. Instead of being humbled as a sinner in dust and ashes, he was lifted up with pride and self-conceit. Instead of being animated with love and pity and compassion, he was inflamed with a fiery and wrathful zeal. "He knew not at all what spirit he was of." In short, he was the very reverse of what he afterwards became.]

2. His enmity against Christ—

[He might have had many opportunities of seeing and hearing Christ, on a supposition he had chosen to embrace them. But, like proud and ignorant bigots of later ages, he would not condescend to hear one who was so generally despised. He probably believed all the scandalous reports that were circulated respecting Jesus, and therefore thought him unworthy of his attention. From the Prophecies indeed he could not but know that the promised Messiah was to appear about that time: but having imbibed the prejudices of his countrymen respecting a temporal Messiah, he concluded that Jesus was an impostor; and no doubt rejoiced when the influence of that deceiver (as he thought him,)

[a] Rom. vii. 9.

him,) was terminated by his death. But when the doctrines of the Gospel were propagated with such success by the Apostles, then his disappointment appeared, and he broke forth into the fiercest rage against Christ. He determined to extirpate his followers, and to blot out, if possible, the very remembrance of his name. Such was his opinion of Christ, that "he thought he ought to do every thing in his power contrary to his name[b]," and adverse to his cause. Nor can we doubt, but that if Jesus had put himself again in the power of the Jews, Paul would have been among the first to apprehend and destroy him. None would have been found more ready than he to nail him to the cross, or to pierce his heart with the spear.]

3. His cruelty to his fellow-creatures—

[He was present at the stoning of the first martyr, Stephen. He heard the discourse of that holy man; he saw "his face shining like the face of an angel;" he heard him with his dying breath praying for his murderers; but was unconvinced, unrelenting, unmoved. One would have thought that a *young* man (whose feelings are quick), and a man pretending to morality, should have felt some pity towards one, whose whole appearance was so devout and holy: and that, when the first stone made the blood to gush out, he should have turned away with disgust and horror. But no such effect was produced on him. On the contrary, he feasted his eyes with this bloody spectacle; and testified his consent to the murderous deed, by holding the garments of the murderers, and giving in his looks very evident tokens of his approbation[c]. Having thus tasted of human blood, he thirsted for it, and, like a blood-hound, would be satisfied with nothing else. He volunteered his services in hunting down the victims of his rage[d]. He obtained authority from the Chief Priests; and in the exercise of it, not only drove the Christians from Jerusalem, but followed them to foreign cities, where he had no jurisdiction[e]. He shewed no pity even to helpless females; but dragged all, men and women, to prison[f], and gave his voice against them that they should be put to death[g]. He suffered none to escape, on any other condition, than that of blaspheming the name of Jesus[h]; and thus, while he inflicted on some the pains of martyrdom, he consigned others over to the damnation of hell. From his own description of himself, he more resembled an incarnate fiend than a human Being[i].]

So strange were the circumstances under which this fiery bigot obtained mercy, that we are peculiarly concerned to inquire into,

II. The

[b] Acts xxvi. 9. [c] Acts vii. 58. & viii. 1. & xxii. 19, 20.
[d] Acts ix. 2. [e] Acts xxvi. 10, 11.
[f] Acts viii. 3. & xxii. 4, 5. [g] Note [c].
[h] Note [c]. [i] Acts ix. 1. Gal. i. 13. & 1 Tim. i. 13.

II. The ends for which mercy was vouchsafed to him—

Doubtless many blessed ends were answered. But, without attempting to enumerate them, we shall notice those only that are specified in the text. It was,

1. For "the manifesting of Christ's patience and long-suffering"—

[The long-suffering of Christ appears in the forbearance he exercises towards mankind at large. It was eminently conspicuous in his conduct towards the antediluvian world, whose wickedness he endured for the space of 120 years[k]. It was wonderfully displayed also in not executing the most signal vengeance on this cruel adversary, and setting him forth as a distinguished monument of his wrath and indignation. But how truly wonderful does it appear, when we see him stopping this blood-thirsty persecutor in the midst of his career, and revealing his pardoning love and mercy to his soul! To take such a viper to his bosom! to make such a creature "an elect vessel," an eminent saint, a distinguished Apostle! to exalt such an one to the most honourable service on earth, and the highest throne in glory! how does this love surpass all knowledge and all conception! How is Jesus now glorified *in him!* and how must he be admired *in him* for ever, both in the Church militant, and the Church triumphant[l]!

This then was one principal end of so marvellous a conversion, namely, that the exceeding riches of the Redeemer's grace might be displayed before the whole universe, both in time and eternity.]

2. For the encouraging of sinners to believe in him—

[It is not uncommon for persons to apprehend themselves so vile that they cannot be forgiven. But our blessed Lord has given a most effectual antidote to this in the conversion of Paul. It is not without reason that Paul repeatedly styles himself "the chief of sinners[m]:" and he expressly tells us, that he was designed to be a "pattern to all who should hereafter believe on Jesus." Our adorable Saviour points, as it were, to him, and says; "See, thou tempted soul, if thou art as blind as that infuriated bigot, I can make "the scales to fall from thine eyes[n]:" if thine enmity against me be as rooted as his, I can slay it: if thou possessest all that is malignant and diabolical, I can change thee: there is nothing too great for me to do, nothing too good for me to give, even to the chief of sinners. I am the same gracious and almighty Saviour that I was in the day that I converted him; and I am able and willing to do the very same things for thee. Thou seest how freely I bestowed my grace on him. If wrath and malice, and murder and blasphemy, could entitle him to my favour, then certainly he had

as

[k] 1 Pet. iii. 20. [l] 2 Thess. i. 10.

[m] ἐμοὶ πρώτῳ should have been so translated in the text, as it is in the verse before it. [n] Acts ix. 18.

as good a title as man could have: but if these things rather entitled him to a distinguished place in hell, then thou seest how free and sovereign my grace is; and hast a proof, that, "where sin has abounded, grace can, and shall, much more abound[o]."

Who, after beholding this pattern, can despond? Who will put away mercy from him under the idea that he is *unworthy* of it? Who will be afraid to come to Jesus, because he has no good work to bring as *a price* of his favour? None that reflect on the salvation of Paul, can ever doubt either the freeness of Christ's offers, or the sufficiency of his grace.]

There are two things which, on account of their singular importance, we will further endeavour to IMPRESS upon your minds:

1. No good that can be possessed will supersede our need of mercy—

[Paul, as has been hinted at before, had much to boast of[p]: but, notwithstanding all his learning, and strictness, and zeal, he had perished for ever, if he had not "*obtained mercy*." Let all consider this; and, renouncing all dependence on themselves, trust in Christ alone, and seek "*life everlasting*" solely "*by believing in him*"———]

2. No evil that can have been committed, shall exclude us from mercy, if we believe on Christ—

[This is the grand scope of the text, and of the discourse upon it. But it never can be repeated too often, or impressed too earnestly on the heart and conscience. It is uniformly attested by all the Inspired Writers[q]. May God help us to believe the record; and cause us all to experience its truth! If our guilt have been as extraordinary as Paul's, it may, for ought we know, have been permitted, on purpose that, like him, we may be extraordinary monuments of grace. At all events, we may urge it as a plea with God, that he will be transcendantly glorified in our salvation[r].]

[o] Rom. v. 20.
[p] Phil. iii. 4—6.
[q] Isai. i. 18. & lv. 7. & Acts xiii. 39.
[r] Ps. xxv. 11.

MLXXX.

THE MEDIATION OF CHRIST.

1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. *There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*

IT is deeply to be regretted, that the holy Scriptures, instead of being improved for the ends for which they were

were given, have been made an occasion of the most bitter contentions by the very persons who have most professed to reverence their authority. Men have not been satisfied with receiving the dictates of inspiration with child-like simplicity, but have determined to reduce them to systems of their own; and have wrested to their own views every passage that militated against their pre-conceived opinions. The partisans on either side have been equally guilty in this respect. Amongst modern controversialists, none have more divided the Church, or indulged more acrimonious feelings against each other, than Calvinists and Arminians. The one party have taken all those passages which represent God as a Sovereign, dispensing his blessings according to his own will and pleasure, and have made all the rest of the Scriptures bend to them: the other party have done the same with respect to the passages which assert the freedom of the human will, and which speak of men as the sole authors of their own condemnation. It seems never to enter into the minds of either party, that those passages which they set at variance, may, like wheels moving in opposite directions, be in perfect harmony with each other; and that there may be a subserviency, where they see nothing but direct opposition. If they were once brought to consider this, they would be more candid in their interpretation of each other's sentiments, and more cautious of wresting from their plain and obvious meaning the passages which they cannot reconcile with their own exclusive system. The words we have just read are a strong hold for those who adopt the sentiments which are called Arminian. And how does the Calvinist get over them? how does he make the universality of redemption accord with his particular election? He knows not how to do it in a way that shall agree with his own system; and therefore he denies at once that Christ did give himself a ransom for *all;* and says, that by "*all*" is meant *some* of every description, that is, some of all different ranks and orders of men, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor. But how much better were it for men to confess their own ignorance, than thus to pervert the

word

word of God! It is true that God acts as a Sovereign; and that salvation, from first to last, is all of grace, whether we can reconcile this truth with every other portion of God's word, or not: nor are we any more at liberty to distort the passages that *appear to* militate against this system, than Arminians are to misinterpret those which obstruct their views. There is, beyond all doubt a harmony in all the parts of the Inspired Volume, though we cannot exactly see it: (not but that we might see it, and clearly too, if we entered fully into the idea of the subordination of one set of truths to another:) and if we determine to speak *all* that the Scripture speaks, and *as* the Scripture speaks it, we shall not be far from the very truth of God. This will not please the partisans of human systems: but it will, as far as such a plan is adopted, produce moderation in our own minds, and forbearance towards all who differ from us.

The way in which the text is introduced deserves particular attention. The Apostle inculcates the duty of "interceding, and giving thanks, for all men" without exception, but especially "for kings and all in authority," because on them in a very great degree depends the peace and welfare of the Church. As a reason for extending our regards to all, he observes, that God does so in the government of the world, and that Christ has done so in the exercise of redeeming love, seeing that he "had given himself a ransom for *all*." The Apostle, whatever be the subject he is treating of, finds an easy and natural transition to Christ, and especially when speaking upon any thing connected with Christian love, of which the love of Christ to us is the great exemplar. This is discovered chiefly in his mediation between God and Man: and of that mediation we are led to speak,

I. As ordained of God—

"There is one God," the Creator and Governor of all—

[Amongst the Heathen "there were gods many, and lords many; but there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things[a]." "He is the God of the Jews, and the God also of the Gentiles;"

[a] 1 Cor. viii. 5, 6.

Gentiles[b];" and both the one and the other he will justify in the same way[c], "having no respect of persons." "In every nation under heaven, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, shall be accepted of him[d]."]

He has also given one Mediator for all—

[He is justly offended with his creatures of mankind, because they have sinned against him. In respect of transgression they are altogether on a par with the fallen angels; and might well have been left, like them, to perish in their sins. But God provided a Mediator for them, that through him reconciliation might be effected with them in perfect consistency with his own perfections. This Mediator is his only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who being in the form of God, and accounting it no robbery to be equal with God, was found in fashion as a man, and took upon him the form of a servant. This "man, Christ Jesus," is the "one Mediator" between God and men. There *is* no other; there *needs to be* no other; seeing that he is equally the Mediator of all, and equally ready to effect reconciliation for every sinner under heaven. The typical Mediators, Moses and Aaron, and the High Priests in all successive ages, executed their office for the Jews only: but Christ, whom they typified, is the Advocate of all, and "a propitiation equally for the sins of the whole world."

Seeing then that God is alike the Father of all, distributing blessings to all with an indiscriminating hand; and that he has given his own co-equal co-eternal Son to be alike the Mediator for all, it becomes us to testify our common concern for all, and to promote by every possible means their eternal welfare.]

Let us next view the Mediation of Christ,

II. As executed by himself—

"He gave himself a ransom" for sinful man—

[A ransom is a redemption-price. Man was in bondage to sin and Satan, death and hell; and to liberate him from this was the end of Christ's mediation. But how was this deliverance to be effected? The law which had been broken, must be honoured; and divine justice, which demanded the punishment of the offender, must be satisfied. But fallen man could neither honour the one, nor satisfy the other. Nothing was left for him, but to endure to all eternity the penalty which justice demanded and the law denounced. To render the salvation of man compatible with the rights of law and justice, Jesus assumed our nature, and "was made man," that in the nature which had sinned he might suffer, and by his own sufferings make an atonement for our transgressions. Having undertaken this great work, he executed it: and there being no other sacrifice sufficient for the occasion, "he gave

[b] Rom. iii. 29. [c] ib. ver. 30. [d] Acts x. 35.

gave *himself* a ransom for us." "The blood of bulls and of goats could never take away sin." They were acceptable to God as shadowing forth *his* sacrifice: but it was *his* sacrifice alone that could atone for sin, and effect the desired reconciliation between God and man: this therefore he offered, and, when the cup of bitterness was put into his hands, he drank it to the very dregs.]

And this he did "for all" without exception[a]—

[To say that he died for the elect only, is neither Scriptural nor true. He died for all: according as it is elsewhere said; "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again[a]." If all be not ultimately saved by his death, it is not owing to any want of sufficiency in his sacrifice to procure acceptance for them, but to their own impenitence and unbelief. And if all do not come to him for an interest in his sacrifice, it is not owing to any decree of God that of necessity excludes them from a participation in the benefit, or to any want of inclination in the Lord Jesus Christ to save them, but to their own obstinacy in sin. Our Lord said to the whole Jewish nation, "How often *would I* have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; but *ye would not.*" This is applicable to the whole human race; and at the last day it will be said to all the ungodly, and especially to those to whom the Gospel of Salvation had been sent, "*I would, but ye would not.*"

Here again then we see the propriety of interesting ourselves with God in behalf of all, since for all without exception did Jesus die.]

It will be proper to consider the mediation of Christ yet farther,

III. As attested by the Holy Spirit—

This mediation was "to be testified of in due time"—

1. It has been abundantly attested by the Holy Spirit in times past—

[In the writings of the Old Testament it is fully declared. "He was cut off, but not for himself[f]:" he was wounded for our transgressions: the chastisement of our peace was upon him: the Lord laid on him the iniquities of us ALL[g]." Of the New Testament this truth forms the sum and substance. When Jesus was just beginning his Ministry, he was pointed out by his Forerunner as "the Lamb of God that should take away the sin of the world[h]." Our Lord spake of himself as "giving his life a ransom for many[i]." St. Paul tells us, that "We have redemption through

[a] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. [f] Dan. ix. 26. [g] Isai. liii. 4—6.
[h] John i. 29. [i] Matt. xx. 28.

through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins[k]," and "reconciliation through the blood of his cross[l]." St. Peter assures us, that "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree, and suffered, the just for the unjust[m]." But it would be endless to accumulate passages; since the whole Scriptures testify of this blessed truth in every part. Suffice it to say, that it forms the one theme of all the glorified saints in heaven, who sing praises day and night "to Him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood;" saying "Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation[n]."]

2. We also are called to testify of it at this time—

[To preach Christ crucified is the one employment of Ministers: and Our Ministry is called "the Ministry of reconciliation" on this very account, because we proclaim to sinners, "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them[o]." O that our testimony amongst you on this subject were more fully credited, and more deeply felt! We do declare it: we declare it with joy: for "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief[p]." None are excluded from an interest in him, but through their own fault. God has no pleasure in the death of any sinner[q]. He even condescends to confirm this truth with an oath[r]. St. Paul bears witness to it in the verse before our text. St. Peter also confirms it, and assures us, that "God is not willing that *any* should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live[s]." And, to add no more, St. John says, "If *any* man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and *not for ours only*, but also for the sins of *the whole world*[t]." Away with the systems that discard these blessed truths, and wrest from their obvious meaning these reviving declarations. Believe it, Brethren, that Jesus "gave himself a ransom for *all*;" and know, that at this moment he addresses you by my mouth, saying, "Look unto me and be ye saved, *all the ends of the earth*; for I am God, and there is none else[u]."]

O Brethren,

1. Stand amazed at this mystery—

["Great indeed is this mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh," and dying under the load of his creatures' sins. Whence is it that this mystery is so little contemplated amongst us,

[k] Eph. i. 7. [l] Col. i. 20—22. [m] 1 Pet. ii. 24. & iii. 18.
[n] Rev. i. 5. & v. 9. [o] 2 Cor. v. 18—21. [p] 1 Tim. i. 15.
[q] Ezek. xviii. 23, 32. [r] Ezek. xxxiii. 11. [s] 2 Pet. iii. 9.
[t] 1 John ii. 1, 2. [u] Isai. xlv. 22.

us, and so little felt? Is it that there is any other subject which deserves our attention in comparison of it? No: there is nothing worth a thought in comparison of it. "For the excellency of the knowledge of it, all that the world holds dear is but dung and dross." Let it then occupy your minds day and night, and fill your souls with transport, as it does the souls of the glorified before the throne of God.]

2. Improve it for the salvation of your own souls—

[On your acceptance of this testimony your everlasting salvation depends. "If you believe in Christ, your salvation is sure; if not, you are condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on you[x]." Believe then, every one of you, that Christ died for *you*; and pray to God, that you may be able to see your interest in him, and with joyful confidence to exclaim, "He hath loved ME, and given himself for ME[y]." Thus shall you be feasted with the foretastes of heaven, and grow up into an increasing meetness for the glory prepared for you.]

[x] John iii. 18, 36. [y] Gal. ii. 20.

MLXXXI.

GODLINESS PROFITABLE UNTO ALL THINGS.

1 Tim. iv. 8, 9. *Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.*

AS in the natural man there is a total alienation of heart from God, so, after that he has been in some measure awakened to a sense of his duty, there is in him a constant proneness to turn aside from God, and to rest in something short of a total surrender of the soul to him. This appears from the numerous controversies which were agitated in the Apostolic age. Christians even in that day were not contented with receiving the truth as it is in Jesus, but laboured to blend with it some favourite notions, either of Jewish superstition or Gentile philosophy; by means of which they drew away the minds of many from the simplicity of the Gospel, and from that practical regard to it which constitutes our highest duty. It is observable, too, that persons addicted to this habit always lay a very undue stress on their own peculiarities, and display more zeal in

in the propagation of them than in the diffusion of the Gospel itself. It is in reference to such practices that the Apostle is speaking in the words before us. He is cautioning Timothy against being led astray by them, or giving any countenance to them in his Ministrations, which should rather be directed to the inculcating and enforcing of vital godliness: "Refuse profane and old wives' fables," says he; "and exercise thyself unto godliness: for bodily exercise, that is, a carnal attention to such things, profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come. *This* (*this character of godliness*, as deserving and demanding our exclusive regards,) is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation."

In confirmation of this saying, I will endeavour to shew,

I. The profitableness of true godliness—

"Godliness" here stands in opposition to all that superstitious or contentious men would place in its stead. It is to be understood as comprehending a surrender of ourselves to God as his redeemed people, and a life of entire devotedness to his service. Now this is profitable,

1. In relation to the present life—

[What is it that has deluged the whole world with misery? What but sin? The world would still have been a Paradise, if man had continued to retain his primitive holiness: and, so far as divine grace prevails to restore holiness to man, the world is again restored to its Paradisiacal state of happiness. True it is that the best of men are yet subject to wants, diseases, and death; so that how holy soever they may be, they must yet partake of the bitter consequences of sin. But the advantages enjoyed by the godly over all the rest of mankind are exceeding great.

First, The godly are *delivered from the dominion of evil passions*, which agitate all the rest of mankind.—See what the state of the world is by reason of pride, envy, malice, wrath, revenge: see what evils abound by reason of covetousness, ambition, lewdness, and selfishness, in ten thousand forms: mark the jealousies of rival kingdoms; the contentions in smaller societies; the feuds in families; and the workings of evil tempers in individuals: see how almost every human Being has his life embittered by something inflicted by others, or brooding in his own bosom:

bosom: and then say, Whether *he* has not the advantage, who has learned to "mortify his earthly members," and to "crucify his flesh with its affections and lusts?"

Next, The godly are enabled to *live under the influence of love*: —and need I say what a source of comfort that is? Read the description of love as set forth in the 13th Chapter of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, and judge, Whether the exercise of such dispositions be not conducive to the happiness of the soul?

Again; The godly are *freed from numberless temptations*, into which the ungodly rush without restraint.—The ungodly, by their intercourse with each other, are walking, either in the midst of thorns and briers, where they constantly receive or inflict some painful wound; or, if their path be more pleasant, they only countenance each other in ways, which bring guilt upon their souls, and involve each other in irremediable ruin. The godly, on the contrary, by keeping at a distance from such snares, avoid the evils connected with them; and by their mutual intercourse promote the edification of each other in faith and love, in peace and holiness.

Add to all this, The godly *enjoy peace with God, and a blessed prospect beyond the grave*.—Oh! who can estimate this advantage? Who can tell what joy a sense of God's pardoning love brings into the soul? Who can declare what the Believer feels in his secret walk with God; in pouring out his soul before him; in apprehending and pleading God's gracious promises, in surveying the fulness of righteousness and grace which is treasured up for him in Christ Jesus, in contemplating every event as ordered for his spiritual and eternal good, and in looking forward to an eternity of bliss in heaven? Who, I say, can calculate these advantages, which are the exclusive portion of the godly?

If it be said, that this description of the Believer's advantages is not realized in fact, I grant that the generality of religious professors do not experience them to the extent that we have spoken of them. But why do they not experience them to this extent? Is it that they do not necessarily attach to vital godliness? No: but that godliness is but at a low ebb amongst those who profess to live under its influence. Were the professors of religion more like to the Apostles in vital godliness, they would, in the same proportion, be elevated above all the rest of the world, both in their character and enjoyments. They would indeed have their afflictions, as the Apostles had: but their "consolations should abound far *above* their afflictions," yea and even *by means of* their afflictions. And, as it is said that "godliness has *the promise* of all this," I will leave it all to rest upon that one saying, "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

him[a]." Let the love of God the Father, and the in-dwelling of the Father and of Christ Jesus in the soul, be duly estimated, and we will leave any man in the universe to judge, whether godliness be not profitable as it respects this present life.]

2. In reference to the life to come—

[Of this there is so little doubt, that we need scarcely stop to confirm it, more especially as our further views of this subject demand a very peculiar attention. Let it only be recollected, that "to those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, God has promised eternal life[b];" and that "they who overcome in this warfare shall sit down with Christ upon his throne, as he sitteth on his Father's throne[c]:" and nothing more need be added to establish this obvious and acknowledged truth.]

Such being the profitableness of true godliness, we proceed to state,

II. The importance of it in that particular view—

Those who have not duly considered this subject would not have expected to find such a peculiar confirmation of it as the Apostle has added in our text. When, in a preceding chapter, he was about to declare the stupendous mystery, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," he prefaced it with this declaration, that the truth he was about to utter was "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation[d]." *There* the importance and mysteriousness of the truth easily account for the solemnity with which it is introduced: but where there is nothing affirmed but the profitableness of godliness, we seem to think so solemn a confirmation of it quite unnecessary. But we shall soon be of a different opinion, if we contemplate this truth in connexion with the subjects which both precede and follow it. We say then, that the profitableness of vital godliness ought to be regarded as a matter of primary and universal importance;

1. As tending to keep the mind from unprofitable speculations—

[The whole preceding context refers to speculations which either already existed in the Church, or that should at a future period be introduced[e]. Heretics and apostates were even then at work to

[a] John xiv. 23. [b] Rom. ii. 7. 1 John ii. 25.
[c] Rev. iii. 21. [d] 1 Tim. i. 15. [e] ver. 1—3, 7.

to spread their pernicious doctrines; those who were of Jewish origin "giving heed to fables and endless genealogies, which ministered questions rather than godly edifying that is in faith[f];" and those from among the Gentile converts obtruding upon the Church their "profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called[g]." The effect of these speculations was exceedingly pernicious: for whilst "conceited and ignorant men doted about such questions and strifes of words, they filled the Church with envy, and strife, and railings, and evil surmisings, and perverse disputings[h]," and eventually turned many from the faith[i].

Now in every age of the Church there are many, who, being themselves, through the subtlety of Satan, turned away from the simplicity of the Gospel, labour to propagate their own peculiar opinions, and to "draw away disciples after them." Their views are often extremely specious, as were those of the Jews who sought to honour Moses[k], and those of the Gentiles who from a professed regard for the honour of Christ pleaded an exemption from obedience to the moral law[l]. Frequently there is much truth mixed up with their errors; and their mistake lies not so much in what they would maintain, as in the undue importance which they attach to some points to the exclusion or neglect of others that are equally important. In a word, they, though "false apostles[m]" in reality, are often so specious, that they appear like Apostles of Christ himself[m].

How then are we to guard against such deceivers? I answer, By having our minds fully intent on practical and vital godliness. We shall see in a moment, that, by suffering our minds to be turned into the channel of controversy, we shall lose much of that heavenliness of mind, that sweetness of temper, that expansion of love, and that singleness of eye, which are the brightest ornaments of our religion, and indispensably necessary to our true happiness. And what shall we gain to compensate for this loss? Nothing but a conceit of our own superior wisdom, and an uncharitable contempt or hatred of all who differ from us. This is the point which the Apostle labours so strenuously to impress upon our minds. "Refuse," says he, "all such exercises; for they are of little profit: but exercise thyself unto godliness," the profit of which can never be duly estimated. Keep habitually upon your minds a sense of the value of true godliness, and you will have no disposition for controversies, nor any satisfaction in the company of those who would obtrude their noxious sentiments upon you. You will act rather in conformity with the Apostolic injunction, "From such withdraw thyself.[n]"]

2. As sustaining the mind under all the trials and difficulties that we may have to cope with—

[To

[f] 1 Tim. 1. 4. & Tit. iii. 9.
[g] 1 Tim. vi. 20.
[h] 1 Tim. vi. 5.
[i] ib. ver. 21.
[k] Col. ii. 20—23.
[l] Jude, ver. 4. 2 Pet. ii. 1, 17—19.
[m] 2 Cor. xi. 3, 4, 13, 14.
[n] 1 Tim. vi. 5.

[To this the Apostle refers, in the words following my text. Exercise yourselves, says he, in this, which will be so profitable to your souls; "FOR" from my own experience I can declare, what support you will find from such conduct, in all the trials that you may be called to endure: "FOR therefore we both labour (gladly), and suffer reproach (cheerfully), because" we are upheld by a consciousness that we are living entirely *upon* God, and *for* God[o]. That the lovers of subtle questions and curious disputations have a zeal, we acknowledge; and that they will often make sacrifices in defence of their tenets, we acknowledge: but in self-denying labours, and patient sufferings for the honour of God and the welfare of mankind, their exertions are paralysed. Their minds become contracted; and they are altogether occupied in maintaining their peculiar notions, and in gaining proselytes to their own party. Not so the persons who steadily labour for the attainment of vital godliness. They have their hearts more and more enlarged with love both to God and man. They feel so rich a recompence sweetly and continually flowing into their souls, that they only regret they cannot do a thousand times more for God, and that they should ever experience any thing but unqualified delight in what they suffer for him[p]. They will "forget all that is behind, and press forward to that which is before;" like persons in a race, who have no desire but to fulfil the will of God, and to "finish their course with joy." In this respect then, no less than in the former, is godliness truly profitable; and that it is so, "is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation."]

Let me then, in this view of the subject, INTREAT you all,

1. To esteem godliness according to its true character—

[The greater part of mankind deny the necessity of it even to their eternal welfare: and, if you justify your zeal by a reference to the future judgment, they will not hesitate to affirm, that such exertions are not necessary to the salvation of the soul, and that to abound in them is to be "righteous over-much." Then, as to the present life, almost all will maintain, that such godliness as the Gospel requires will be subversive of our interests and our happiness in the world; and from those considerations will urge us to lay aside what they call our needless peculiarities. But be assured, that there is no real happiness even in this world, and much less in the world to come, but through an entire devotion of the soul to God. Let no man deceive you in relation to this matter; for "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation." The whole Scripture, from

[o] ver. 10. [p] 2 Cor. xii. 10. "*We take pleasure*," &c.

from the beginning to the end, bears testimony to this truth, that God's service is perfect freedom, and that Religion's "ways are ways of pleasantness and peace." If it be said, that piety will involve us in trouble, for that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;" we reply, It is true: but nevertheless the consolations of the godly shall infinitely overbalance their afflictions; nor are "the sufferings of this present life worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us[q]." Let this then be a fixed principle in all your hearts, that "the fear of the Lord, *that* is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding."]

2. To seek it according to its real worth—

[The word which we translate, "*exercise* thyself" unto godliness, is taken from the Grecian games, in which those who engaged stripped themselves of all unnecessary clothing, in order that they might be able to exert themselves with more effect[r]. Now in this manner should we address ourselves to the work of religion. We should feel that the utmost possible exertions are necessary for the attaining of such a measure of it as will secure the prize. We should cast off everything that may impede our progress in it; and determinately engage in it as those who will at least take care not to lose the prize through any fault or negligence of their own. You well know how those who were to contend in the Olympic games denied themselves, and by what a long course of training they endeavoured to fit themselves for their respective contests. Oh, Brethren, enter thus into the prosecution of true piety, "avoiding all foolish questions as unprofitable and vain[s];" and keeping your eye steadily fixed on the attainment of the Divine image in your soul: then will you "grow up into Christ in all things as your living Head," and then will you find that "you will not labour in vain or run in vain."]

[q] Rom. viii. 18. [r] γύμναζε σεαυτὸν, ver. 7. [s] Tit. iii. 9.

MLXXXII.

THE QUALITY OF MEN'S WORKS DISCOVERED IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

1 Tim. v. 24, 25. *Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.*

AN attention to the context is of the greatest importance

portance in explaining the holy Scriptures: nor is there any error into which we may not run, if we overlook the connexion in which every different expression stands. Yet it is possible to err even on that side: for the Inspired Writers are not so fettered, but that they sometimes pass from one subject to another without any connexion except what existed in their own minds, and sometimes with an easy, though not a logical, transition. Many able Commentators, through an excessive attention to the context, would limit the words before us to the admission of persons to the Ministerial office, of which the Apostle is speaking in the foregoing verses. But I am persuaded, that they ought not to be so limited. They arise indeed from that subject; but they carry the mind beyond it; and were intended to encourage Timothy to execute with fidelity the trust reposed in him: he must "not lay hands suddenly on any, lest he become a partaker of their sins:" but if, after all his care, he should be deceived, he shall not be deemed guilty on that account since God only can see the heart: and the mistakes which are made respecting the characters of men in this life, shall all be rectified in the life to come.

Taking the words in this sense, they will be found to express *the very same idea*, and in *the very same connexion*, which *the same Apostle* has suggested in other places; to which, in the progress of our subject, we shall have occasion to refer[a].

Fully persuaded in my own mind that the words do ultimately refer to the day of judgment, I shall proceed,

I. To mark the truths which are here declared—

These relate to all the different works of men;—to,

1. Their evil works—

[Many

[a] 1 Cor. iii. 9—15. & iv. 2—5. In both of these places the Apostle is speaking of the Ministry of the word: in the former, he refers to the day of judgment as determining the quality of the fruits produced by it; and in the latter, as deciding upon his character as to fidelity in the discharge of his Ministerial office. Indeed so intimate was the connexion between the Ministerial office and the day of judgment in his mind, that he scarcely ever mentions the one without referring to the other.

[Many sins are so flagrant, that, as they render a person manifestly unfit for admission to the Ministerial office[b], so they leave no doubt respecting the judgment which will be passed upon them in the last day. Nor do we include in this number those only which are of the grosser kind, and which are stamped with infamy by even the better kind of Heathens, (such as fornication and adultery,) but those also which, though they bring with them no stigma in the estimation of mankind, are decidedly reprobated by the word of God. Amongst the foremost of these we must mention *a worldly spirit*, which as decidedly proves a person to be destitute of true religion as any other sin whatever: for to serve God and Mammon too is impossible[c]. The true disciple of Christ is no more of the world than his Lord and Master was[d]. *A disregard of the Gospel* too is another of those sins which will infallibly bring condemnation upon the soul: for "if judgment begin, as it surely will, at the House of God, What shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God[e]?" How is it possible that any should "escape, who neglect so great salvation[f]?" We might mention a variety of other sins, which, though they are accounted light and venial by the ungodly world, stamp the character so clearly and manifestly, that no one who believes the Scriptures can doubt one moment what the issue of them will be in the day of judgment[g].

But whilst these "go before to judgment," others of a more secret and dubious nature "follow after." There are many sins in the heart, which, though harboured and indulged there, escape the eye of men, and are known to God alone. It is no uncommon thing for men to stand well both in their own eyes and in the estimation of others, and yet to be hateful in the sight of the heart-searching God. Their works may externally be good, and yet not be perfect before God[h]. Men may "have a name to live, and yet in reality be dead[i]." They may have much religion in appearance, and yet "all their religion be vain[k]." But it is not till the day of judgment that their real character will be known: and, when disclosed by God, and visited with merited displeasure, it will cause the utmost surprise in all who once knew and admired them upon earth[l]. Then, if not before, "their sin will find them out."]

2. Their good works—

[Some

[b] The reader will observe, that the more limited sense of the words is not lost sight of, though the more enlarged sense is decidedly preferred.

[c] Matt. vi. 24. [d] John xvii. 14, 16. [e] Heb. ii. 3.
[f] 1 Pet. iv. 17. [g] 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. Gal. v. 19—21.
[h] 2 Chron. xxv. 2. Luke viii. 14. [i] Rev. iii. 1—3.
[k] Jam. i. 26.
[l] Job xx. 5—7. What language can convey all the pathos that is implied in that expression, "Where is he?"

[Some men are so eminently holy, that no one could hesitate to pronounce them fit to be employed in the sacred Ministry of the Gospel: nor can any one doubt respecting the safety of their state when they die. It is said of seamen, that, though the most experienced may sometimes mistake a cloud for land, the most inexperienced never mistakes land for a cloud; there being in the land something which carries its own evidence along with it. Thus vital godliness, when exhibited in bright colours, and in an uniform consistent tenor, commends itself to all who behold it: it is a light, which needs nothing else to testify of it, or to set it forth: its own effulgence is the most convincing evidence of its existence. The ultimate happiness of those who possess it, is foreseen with an assured confidence by all who mark its course.

But there are some whose piety, in consequence of the slenderness of their attainments, or the privacy of their situation, or the insuperable diffidence and reserve of their minds, is concealed from public view. External circumstances too may sometimes occasion the light, though real, to be obscured; as was the case with those "seven thousand men in Israel," who, though unknown to the prophet Elijah, had never bowed their knee to the image of Baal. Indeed, it is of the nature of true religion to affect secrecy. The sighs, and groans, and prayers, and tears of the real penitent are poured forth in secret: and the consciousness of being seen or heard by any mortal man, would be sufficient to stifle all. The inward affiance of the soul too is unknown to any but God; as indeed are also all the sublimest workings of the affections towards God. None but "He who searches the heart and tries the reins" can discern that entireness of heart which constitutes a man "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile." But God does see, yea, and mark also, those sublimer exercises of the soul, which are hid from all besides. It is not for those only who speak often one to another that God records his approbation in the book of his remembrance, but for those also who in modest silence "*think* upon his name[m]:" and though those thoughts were altogether hidden from their earthly friends, he will bring them forth at the last day as evidences in favour of those who fostered them in their bosoms, and will recompense them with testimonies of his warmest approbation[mm]. "The hidden man of the heart" is that which constitutes our brightest ornament in this world[n], and which most insures his plaudit in the world to come.]

Such being the truths contained in our text, we go on,

II. To deduce from them some important observations—

In

[m] Mal. iii. 16. [mm] Rev. xiv. 13. "Their works do follow them."
[n] 1 Pet. iii. 4.

In the view of the future judgment,

1. We should diligently acquaint ourselves with God's rule of judgment—

[The written word of God is the rule of our conduct: and it is that also by which we shall be tried in the last day. We are told, that "in that day, when the judgment is set, the books shall be opened[o]," for the express purpose "that all may be judged out of them:" and though there may be various other books, as the book of providence, the book of conscience, and the book of life, yet we are sure that the book of the Scriptures must be one. Now that book changeth not, nor accommodates itself to the wishes of any: and it is in vain for us to complain of it as too strict, or to say respecting any thing in it, "This is an hard saying; Who can hear it?" It is in vain to reduce its demands to any standard of our own. Whatever we or the whole world may say, God's requirements will be the same, and his judgment will be in perfect correspondence with them. We should not therefore be inquiring, what the opinions of men are in relation to these things, but what God speaks in his word. We should study that word with care: we should bring ourselves to it as a touch-stone[oo]: we should pray over it, with an earnest desire to understand its true import, and with a full determination of heart, through grace, to follow it in every particular. We should beg of God to "write his law in our hearts," and to "cast our souls, as it were, into the very mould of his Gospel:" for, when "truth exists in our inward parts," we need not fear but that "the Lord, the righteous Judge, will confer upon us a crown of righteousness in the great day of his appearing[p]."]

2. We should contentedly refer ourselves to his judgment—

[Let our conduct be ever so pure, and ever so wise, it will not be possible for us to escape the reproaches of an ungodly world. Even those who profess godliness are not always candid in their judgment: on the contrary, they are very apt to put an unkind construction on the conduct of others, especially when it militates in any degree against their wishes or interests. Who would have thought that even the apostle Paul should be traduced as a time-serving man, whose views, and aims, and habits, were altogether carnal? Yet thus was he judged, even by many who professed a great zeal for religion[q]. Who then can hope to escape the censures of men? Who can hope so to walk as never to be misrepresented by those who see his actions only, but are unacquainted with his motives and principles? It may be that even the heaviest charges may be brought against us without any

[o] Dan. vii. 10. Rev. xx. 12.
[oo] John iii. 21.
[p] 2 Tim. iv. 8.
[q] 2 Cor. x. 2.

any foundation; and that we may be persecuted, as David was by Saul, with unrelenting fury, when our conduct has been as discreet and blameless as the most consummate piety could inspire. Well, if such be our lot, let it not weigh too heavily on our minds: let us say with Paul, "It is a small matter with me to be judged of man's judgment: for God will, ere long, bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man" who has deserved it, "have praise of God[r]." The expression here in the original is remarkable; "It is a small matter to be judged of man's *day*." Man has *his day:* but God has *his* also. And man's day consists of but a few hours: but God's shall endure for ever. Therefore we may well commit our cause to God without anxiety, and wait with patience the time of his coming, when "he will bring forth our righteousness as the light, and our judgment as the noon-day."]

3. We should however be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy—

[As our conduct may be misinterpreted by others, so may it also be misjudged by ourselves. Self-love is very apt to blind us, and to make us form a favourable opinion of ourselves, when we are in reality widely deviating from the path of duty. How little did the Apostles imagine that they were actuated by a sinful principle, when they would have called fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village! They gave themselves credit for a holy zeal, whilst they were altogether under the influence of pride and revenge. And what our blessed Lord said to them, is but too applicable on many occasions to ourselves, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of." We should bear in mind that we are partial judges in every thing that relates to ourselves; and that excessive confidence of our own innocence is replete with danger, not only as preventing a careful self-examination, but as creating in us an unhallowed boldness before God: for "Not he that commendeth himself shall be ultimately approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth[s]." The apostle Paul himself, though he was unconscious of any thing amiss within him, would not venture too confidently to assert his innocence; but commended himself to the judgment of the heart-searching God:—"I know nothing by myself," says he; "yet am I not hereby justified: but he that justifieth me is the Lord[t]." Thus we also should cultivate within ourselves a holy fear, lest some hidden "evils, which went not before to judgment, should follow after," and "find us out," when they can neither be rectified nor pardoned. There is "a fire that shall try our every work:" and that only shall be *approved* which stands the test of that day[u].]

4. We

[r] 1 Cor. iv. 3, 5.
[s] 2 Cor. x. 18.
[t] 1 Cor. iv. 4.
[u] 1 Cor. iii. 13—15.

4. We should act to God in all that we do—

[It is in vain to act to man, or to seek the applause of man: for his judgment, whether favourable or unfavourable, will not affect our future state: the judgment of the whole world will not influence our Judge: he will "judge righteous judgment;" and either acquit or condemn, according as we are found conformed to him in holiness, or destitute of his blessed image. Man's rule of duty is so defective, that we shall greatly err, if we satisfy ourselves with that: yea, it is in the most essential matters so erroneous, that "if we seek to please men, we cannot be the servants of Jesus Christ[u]." Our great object must be, to approve ourselves to God; and then we need not be much concerned whether our actions be followed by an "evil or good report" from the partial judges that are around us. I mean not by this that we should be inattentive to the opinions of men, or that we should disregard their censures: for, as far as we possibly can, "we should provide things honest in the sight of all men:" but it is God's word only that we should take as the rule of our conduct, and him alone whom we should strive to please: and, if men be not satisfied with us for serving God according to his written word, we must be content to suffer obloquy from them, and determine to "obey God rather than man." However we may be "judged according to men in the flesh," we need fear nothing, if "we live according to God in the Spirit[x]." We shall "enjoy the testimony of a good conscience," as Hezekiah did[y]; "and have confidence before God now, and not be ashamed before him at his coming[z]."]

[u] Gal. i. 10. [x] 1 Pet. iv. 6.
[y] 2 Cor. i. 12. 2 Kin. xx. 3. [z] 1 John ii. 28. & iii. 19—21.

MLXXXIII.

THE GOSPEL PRODUCTIVE OF GOOD WORKS.

1 Tim. vi. 3. *The doctrine which is according to Godliness.*

THE objections which men urge against the doctrines of the Gospel, originate for the most part in their aversion to its precepts. The restraint which it imposes on their actions is irksome to them. They wish to follow the impulse of their passions, or the dictates of self-interest: and when they are checked in their progress, they complain, that the path marked out for them is too strait, and the yoke which we would put upon them is too heavy.

St. Paul is giving directions for the conduct of

masters and servants towards each other: but, however "wholesome his words" were, he foresaw that some would "not consent to" them, notwithstanding they were "the words of Christ himself," and in perfect unison with the Gospel, which was, in that, as well as in every other respect, "a doctrine according to godliness." He then proceeds to animadvert upon such characters, and to shew that their dislike to the injunctions given them was owing only to their own pride, and ignorance, and love of sin.

The expression contained in the text is peculiarly worthy of our attention. It gives a just, and very important view of the Gospel; to illustrate and confirm which is the intent of this discourse.

In order to prove that the Gospel is indeed "a doctrine according to godliness," let us consult,

I. Its doctrines—

We might, if our time would admit of it, illustrate this in every one of the doctrines of our holy religion. But we shall confine ourselves to,

1. The representations which it gives us of God—

[The systems of religion which obtained among the Heathen, were calculated rather to promote, than to repress, iniquity: for even their gods themselves, according to their own representation of them, were monsters of iniquity. But our God is holy and just; so holy, that he cannot look upon sin without the utmost abhorrence of it[a]; and so just, that he will never suffer it to pass unpunished[b].

If indeed these were his only attributes, men might sit down in despair, and take their fill of sin, because they would have no encouragement to depart from it. But "there is mercy also with him, that he may be feared;" yea, so "rich is he in mercy," that "none shall ever seek his face in vain."

How must the contemplation of such perfections tend to deter men from the commission of evil, and to foster in them every holy sentiment and desire!]

2. The means which it prescribes for our reconciliation with him—

[The leading feature of the Gospel is, that it proclaims pardon to penitent sinners, through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let any one reflect on this stupendous mystery, the incarnation and

[a] Hab. i. 13. [b] Exod. xxxiv. 7.

and death of the Son of God; let him consider, that no less a sacrifice than that made by our incarnate God was sufficient to atone for sin; and will he then be willing to incur all the penalties of sin, and to bear them in his own person? Will not the tears and agonies of an expiring Saviour compel him to exclaim, "If such things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" and will not the love of Christ in submitting to such an ignominious death, on purpose that he might redeem him from iniquity, have any influence on his mind? Will he readily trample on the blood that was shed for him, and crucify his Lord afresh by continuing in sin?]

Let us prosecute the same inquiry, in relation to,

II. Its precepts—

View the precepts relating to God and our neighbour—

[The two great commandments of the law are confirmed and ratified by the Gospel, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." Now can any man love God, and not endeavour to do his will? Or, if he make his own self-love the rule and measure of his love to others, can he willingly injure them in any thing, or forbear to do them good? Would not an unfeigned love to these commands lay the axe to the root of all sin, and transform men into the very image of their God?]

View the directions which it gives for self-government—

[The Gospel does not regulate the actions only, but the heart: it extends its dominion over all the most secret motives and inclinations; and requires every thought to be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. It makes no allowance for temptations, as though they extenuated the guilt of sin, or were an excuse for the commission of iniquity; but teaches us to "heap coals of fire on the head of an enemy" by acts of kindness, and "not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good." It tolerates no kind or degree of sin, but enjoins us to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God." It requires us to "be holy as God himself is holy," and "perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect."

Can any one that considers these precepts, doubt what is the nature and tendency of the Gospel?]

Let us examine further,

III. Its examples—

It calls us to an imitation of,

1. Our

1. Our blessed Lord—

[He was virtue itself embodied. Neither friends nor enemies could ever find in him the smallest spot or blemish. Under circumstances the most trying that can be imagined, he preserved the same serenity of mind, the same meek and heavenly disposition. While he was suffering the most injurious treatment, he was like a lamb led to the slaughter: and in the very agonies of death, he prayed for nothing but blessings on the head of his cruel murderers. Now we are told, that in all this "he set us an example, that we should follow his steps:" and that all his followers must "walk even as he walked."]

2. His holy Apostles—

[These were far inferior indeed to their Divine Master; yet were they bright patterns of every thing that was excellent and praise-worthy. As being men of like passions with us, they manifested on some occasions their infirmities: and, in these instances, they are warnings to us, and not examples. But, for the most part, they conducted themselves in a way that excites our highest admiration. And though on account of their defects we cannot follow them in every thing, yet we are called on the whole to tread in their steps, and to "be followers of them, as they were of Christ."

Are not these sufficient proofs of the holy tendency of the Gospel?]

INFER,

1. How little reason is there for objecting to the Gospel as unfriendly to morality!

[Men ground this objection upon the doctrine of our being "justified by faith only, without the works of the law." But if they would consider that that faith is always preceded by repentance, and followed by obedience, they would see that there was no foundation at all for their objection. If we said that people might live and die in an impenitent and disobedient state, and yet be saved by their faith, then there were good reason to condemn the Gospel which we preach: but while we maintain the character of God as it is exhibited in the Gospel, together with the obligation of its precepts, and the purity of its examples, no man need to tremble for the ark of God. A roof is not the less necessary to a house, because it is not to be laid as a foundation: nor are works less necessary because they cannot justify us before God. Let them but stand in their proper place, and they are as necessary as faith itself.]

2. How deluded are they who hold the truth in unrighteousness!

[There doubtless are many who profess to believe in Christ, while

while yet by their works they utterly deny him. There was one of this description even in the family of Christ himself. But will the faith which they exercise, be sufficient to save them? No: their faith is dead, being alone: it is no better than the faith of devils: nor will it be productive of any benefit to their souls: yea rather, inasmuch as it argued light and knowledge, it will only enhance their guilt, and aggravate their condemnation. Let those who are not occupied in a careful imitation of their Lord, and an unreserved obedience to his will, know assuredly, that if, on the one hand, he that believeth shall be saved, so, on the other hand, "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven."]

3. How great are the obligations of God's people to walk circumspectly!

[The world will judge of the Gospel, not so much by what they hear, as by what they see. Now, though they have no right to act thus, we should be careful not to lay a stumbling-block before them. We should endeavour rather to make a good impression on their minds, and to give them no occasion from our conduct to speak evil of the truth itself. We should shew them by our lives, that their fears respecting the licentious tendency of the Gospel are groundless. By walking as it becometh saints, we should put to silence their ignorant objections, and constrain them to confess, that, however the Gospel may be dishonoured by its friends, or calumniated by its enemies, it is indeed a doctrine according to godliness.]

MLXXXIV.

GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT.

1 Tim. vi. 6. *Godliness with contentment is great gain.*

TO the great dishonour of Christianity, there are many professors, and even preachers of it, who are more intent on promoting their own temporal interests, or the interests of their party, than on advancing practical religion in the world. Of such persons St. Paul is speaking in the context: and he enjoins Timothy to withdraw himself from them, as from persons who disgraced the Christian name, by giving reason to people to conclude, that "they supposed gain to be godliness." In opposition to such characters, the Apostle reverses that which he had stated as their opinion; and declares, that though gain was not godliness, godliness was

was gain, yea, and "great gain," if it were joined "with contentment."

In vindication of this sentiment, we shall shew,

I. What we are to understand by "godliness"—

The frame of mind which we may conceive the angels to enjoy, would be by no means suited to our state: we are sinners, redeemed sinners; and therefore "godliness" must include such a frame of mind as becomes persons in our condition. In this view, it implies,

1. An affiance in God through Christ—

[This is the foundation of all true religion. Whatever a man may possess without this, he has not one particle of real godliness. If we could suppose him to be as just and honest, as kind and amiable, yea, as devout and fervent, as ever man was, still, if he had not the heart of a sinner, of a sinner justly condemned, and delivered from condemnation solely by the blood of Christ, he would be utterly destitute of true religion ———]

2. A devotedness to God in Christ—

[This must spring from the former: for though faith and practice differ from each other, as much as the root of a tree does from the fruit it bears, yet we must by no means separate them, since they are equally essential to real godliness. A reformation of the external conduct, or a partial surrender of the heart to God, will not suffice: if we would be approved by God, we must have "our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, sanctified" to his service ——— And as Christ is the only Mediator through whom we approach to God, so must Christ, that is, God in Christ, be our only Lord and Governor.]

When we have just views of the nature of godliness, we shall see,

II. Its connexion with contentment—

Such godliness as has been described must bring contentment along with it, since all who possess it must feel,

1. A consciousness that they deserve the miseries of hell—

[No person can have an entire affiance in God through Christ, till he have felt his desert of God's wrath and indignation. And can such a person be discontented with any lot that may be assigned him? Must he not, even in the most afflicted situation, say, "Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his

his sins?" Will he not call every affliction light, yea, lightness itself, in comparison of the misery he deserves? Will he not, under the pressure of the heaviest calamities, thank God that he is not in hell?]

2. A sense of infinite obligation to God for mercies received—

[One who has within him the constituents of real godliness, must see himself to be infinitely indebted to God for the gift of his dear Son, for the knowledge of salvation by him, and for the prospect of everlasting glory. His sense of these mercies cannot but be heightened also by the consideration, that they were never once offered to the fallen angels, nor accepted by the great majority of those to whom they have been offered. Can such an one repine that he has a less measure of health, or riches, or temporal conveniences than others, when he is so far exalted above them in things of infinitely greater moment?]

3. A willingness to be conformed to the image of Christ—

[No true disciple of Christ expects or wishes to be in a state different from that which his Lord and Master experienced when on earth. But what was the condition of Jesus in the world? Did he live in ease and affluence and honour? No; "he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He subsisted oftentimes on the benevolence of his friends and followers; and often had not so much as "a place where to lay his head." Who that reflects on this, will murmur at his lot, even though nothing but poverty and persecution should await him? Will he not check the first risings of discontent with this obvious reflection, "The disciple cannot be above his Lord: it is sufficient for the disciple that he be as his Lord?"]

The connexion of godliness with contentment being thus plain, let us consider,

III. The advantage of it as so connected—

St. Paul tells us, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Let us view it then,

1. In reference to this life—

[Money has obtained the exclusive title of "gain:" but godliness has an incomparably greater right to that appellation. There are three principal ends for which money is considered as valuable; namely, to provide present gratifications, to secure against future troubles, and to benefit our children or dependents. But in these respects it cannot for one moment stand in competition

tition with godliness,—that godliness I mean which is connected with contentment. Suppose money to afford ever such high gratifications, (though it is very much over-rated by the generality,) will not pardon of sin, peace of conscience, and the enjoyment of the Divine presence, far outweigh them all? Suppose money to afford effectual relief in trouble, (though it cannot assuage our pain either of mind or body,) what consolations can it afford equal to those which result from godliness and contentment? The utmost that money can do, is to procure some outward relief; whereas the piety above described will convert every cross into a comfort, and every trouble into a fountain of joy. We are ready to acknowledge that money has its uses, and very important uses too, in reference to our children or dependents, (though it not unfrequently is a curse to them rather than a benefit), yet even in this view is it far inferior to religion: for the godly and contented man will instruct his children and dependents in those principles which he has found so beneficial to himself: and who can duly estimate the benefit of such instructions, confirmed and enforced by such an example? Who can value sufficiently the intercessions of such a friend? Suppose a dying man to address his surviving relatives, 'I have not wealth laid up for you in my coffers, but I have thousands of prayers treasured up for you in heaven, which, I trust, will come down in blessings on your heads, when I lie mouldering in the dust: I have engaged my God to be the Husband of the widow, and the Father of the fatherless; yes, My dear wife and children, I have intreated *him* to take care of you; and I believe that my prayers have not gone forth in vain:' I say, such a legacy would be far better than thousands of silver and gold.

Thus in every view for which money is coveted, godliness with contentment is a richer portion.]

2. In reference to the world to come—

[The blindest worldling in the universe is not foolish enough to think that "riches will profit him in the day of wrath." In the words following the text this point is established beyond all contradiction; "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out." Here therefore all competition ceases; and "gain", must be confessed to belong exclusively to the godly and contented mind.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who boast of contentment, while they are destitute of godliness—

[That persons may feel contentment while enjoying all that they can wish, we readily acknowledge. But we have not real contentment, unless we could be contented with any change of circumstances which God might see fit to appoint. Nor indeed

can

can this fruit spring from any thing but real godliness. Therefore the complacency which many take in their own fancied contentment, while they are uninfluenced by vital godliness, is a delusion, which, if not rectified in time, will issue in the most fearful disappointment and misery.]

2. Those who profess godliness, but manifest a worldly or discontented spirit—

[The tree must be judged of by its fruits. In vain are the highest pretensions to Christian experience, if we be not dead to the world, and resigned to the will of God. O Brethren, how many professors of godliness have, "through a *desire* to be rich[a], fallen into snares and temptations, and into foolish and hurtful lusts, which have drowned them in destruction and perdition!" Remember, that "the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some have coveted after, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows." But thou man of God, flee these things, and seek rather to be "rich towards God."]

3. Those who profess both godliness and contentment—

[Know, that you have a richer portion than crowns or kingdoms. You never can have occasion to envy any man. Only seek to grow in these divine graces. Give yourselves up wholly to God; and "having food and raiment, be therewith content[b]." Godliness is "durable riches;" and one grain of contentment is worth a talent of gold. Let it appear, Beloved, that you live under a full persuasion of these things; and that your ardour in pursuit of heaven is accompanied with a proportionable indifference about the things of time and sense.]

[a] *βυλόμενοι πλουτεῖν*, ver. 9—11. [b] ver. 8.

MLXXXV.

THE TRUE USE OF RICHES.

1 Tim. vi. 17—19. *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

TO inculcate duties, is no less the office of a pious Minister, than to establish principles: nor should he shew less zeal in the one than in the other. Our Lord commanded

commanded his Apostles to enforce the observance of what men ought to *do*, as well as the reception of what they ought to *believe*[a]: and St. Paul, whose zeal was so conspicuous in establishing the doctrines of the Gospel, evinces in every epistle not a whit less zeal to bring men under the influence of its precepts. He even descends to particularize all the duties pertaining to the different relations of life, as of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, Rulers and subjects; and he solemnly enjoined Timothy and Titus to do the same in their respective ministrations. Nay more, he "charged them" to speak on these subjects with all authority[b]; and to press them on the attention of every distinct class of hearers, so that each might fulfil the duties which pertained more immediately to himself. The rich were not in this respect to be overlooked, any more than the poor; nor were they to be addressed with less authority than the poor. Timothy, though quite a young Minister, was to consider himself as speaking in the name and with the authority of Almighty God; and was not merely to exhort, but to "charge," the richest and most powerful of his flock, and most solemnly to enjoin on them a conscientious use of their wealth, for the honour of God, and for the benefit of mankind.

In the charge which Timothy was to give to the rich, we see,

I. The temptations which they are to avoid—

To fix the standard, and to draw an exact line between those who are "rich in this world," and those who are not, is no easy task; because what would be wealth to a peasant would be poverty to a man whose rank and station in life called for a more enlarged expenditure. But we shall mark the character with sufficient precision, if we say, that the rich in this world are those who possess already, or are able by their different vocations to obtain, what is sufficient for their support in that rank of life wherein Divine Providence has placed them: for all persons so circumstanced have it in their power,

[a] Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. [b] ver. 13, 14.

power, by frugality and self-denial, to appropriate a portion of their income to the uses that are here specified.

But to persons so circumstanced many temptations will arise. They will in particular find occasion to guard against,

1. Pride—

[If from any source whatever a man have acquired an increase of wealth, and especially if he have acquired it by his own skill or industry, he immediately conceives himself entitled to a greater measure of respect and honour from all around him. He seems by that circumstance to have attained somewhat of intrinsic worth and excellence; never reflecting, that, as a horse is not a whit better for the trappings with which he is decorated, so neither is a man for the splendor with which he is encompassed. Even good king Hezekiah was led away with this folly, when the Babylonish ambassadors came to visit him: and the judgments inflicted on him on account of it, sufficiently shew how hateful it is in the sight of God.

Yet, such is the infirmity of human-nature, that a man of this description is ready to arrogate also to himself some superior value even before God. He is now no longer to be addressed with all that plainness and fidelity which he admitted when in a lower station. Because "he is full, he is ready to deny the authority of God, and to say, Who is the Lord[c]?" or, if he pay attention to the outward observances of religion, he does it, not because they are due from him, but because he thinks it right to set a good example to others; just as if the duties incumbent on *others* did not attach equally to *himself*. A remarkable instance of such folly and impiety may be seen in king Uzziah[d]; who, because he had greatly increased in military power, conceived himself authorized to invade the priestly office[e]. But all such high thoughts of ourselves are most offensive to God: and therefore we solemnly caution all of you against admitting them into your minds; and "charge the rich in particular, that they be not high-minded."]

2. Creature-confidence—

[It is exceeding difficult to possess riches, and not to trust in them for some measure of security or happiness; for both of which we ought to trust in God alone. Our Lord intimates this: for, when his Disciples expressed their wonder at that saying of our Lord, "How hardly shall they that *have* riches enter into the kingdom of God!" he immediately explained himself, by saying,

[c] Prov. xxx. 9.
[d] 2 Kin. xx. 12—18. & 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 26.
[e] 2 Chron. xxvi. 16.

saying, "How hardly shall they that *trust in* riches enter into the kingdom of God:" by which he would have them to understand, that very few could possess them without trusting in them[f]: "The rich man's wealth is his strong city," says Solomon[g]: he fancies himself encompassed with that which will protect him from evil, and secure to him the possession of present good. But this is greatly to dishonour God. He has given us all that we possess: he has given it to be enjoyed, yea, and richly to be enjoyed: but he never gave it to be *trusted in:* he never designed that men should rest in the gifts, and forget the Giver; or fix on *senseless vanities* the regards which are due only to "*the living God.*" To them belongs nothing but "uncertainty:" they cannot be depended on for one moment: they may, even whilst we think ourselves most secure of their continuance, "make themselves wings, and fly away." Or, if they be not removed from us, we may in an instant be removed from them by Him who said to the rich man, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." Let me then guard you all against "making gold your hope, or saying to fine gold, Thou art my confidence;" for it is a grievous impiety in the sight of God, and "an iniquity to be punished by the Judge[h]."]

Wealth is given for far other purposes than these; as will be seen, whilst I point out to the possessors of it,

II. The duties they are to perform—

To be dispensed in acts of benevolence is the true use of wealth—

[Nothing is given to us for ourselves alone. As the sun in the firmament possesses not its light and heat for its own aggrandisement, but for the benefit of the whole creation, so all that we possess is for the good of those who lie within the sphere of our influence. It is a talent committed to us by Almighty God, who will call us to an account for the improvement we make of it. He permits us, as we have before said, "richly to enjoy" whatever he has bestowed upon us: but our richest enjoyment of it should be in the exercise of Christian benevolence. We should "do good" with it: we should be "rich in good works;" accounting ourselves rich, not in proportion to what we can amass or spend upon ourselves, but in proportion to the good which we are thereby qualified to dispense, and the benefits which we are enabled by it to confer upon the Church and on the world around us. Nor should our wealth be disposed of in this way "grudgingly, or of necessity;" we should be "ready to distribute, and willing to communicate;" precisely as one member of our body would be to administer to any other that needed its assistance. These

[f] Mark x. 23, 24. [g] Prov. x. 15. [h] Job xxxi. 24, 25, 28.

These are the dispositions which the rich are to cultivate, and these the works in which they are to abound.]

Nor is this less their interest than it is their duty—

[By such acts as these "we lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, and eventually lay hold on eternal life." In hoarding up money, we lay it up *for others*, (not by any means knowing who shall actually inherit it:) but by dispersing it in acts of piety and beneficence, we store it up *for ourselves*, rendering that "a firm foundation," which was in itself "uncertain;" and that "eternally" permanent, which was in itself confined to "this present world." If the present enjoyment alone were considered, this mode of disposing of it would be our truest wisdom, since there is an infinitely richer zest arising from the exercise of love to God and of benevolence to man, than from all the selfish gratifications that wealth can ever purchase. But besides the present satisfaction arising from these sources, there is a full confidence in the soul that God himself will minister to our necessities in the time of need[i], and an assured hope of his approbation in the day that he shall judge the world. Not that there is any thing meritorious in works of charity, or that they shall go before us to procure for us an entrance into heaven: but "they will follow us[k]" as evidences of our faith and love, and be brought forth before the universe for special approbation and reward. God has pledged himself, that "what we give to the poor he will regard as lent to him, and that he will repay it again[l];" not even a cup of cold water being forgotten, but every the smallest act of kindness being "recompensed at the resurrection of the just[m]."]

Such then being the duty of the rich in relation to their wealth, I come, in conclusion, to address to them a solemn CHARGE respecting it—

Brethren, if I were addressing you as persons ignorant of Christ and of his salvation, I should, notwithstanding I come as an ambassador from God himself, and speak to you in Christ's stead, be satisfied with the language of intreaty; and should "*beseech* you, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God." But since ye profess to have believed in Christ, you acknowledge your obligation to fulfil his will: and therefore, instead of beseeching you to make this use of your property, I solemnly *charge* you, or, as the word is elsewhere translated, "*command*" you[n], to comply with his injunctions in respect to these things.

1. If

[i] Ps. xli. 1—3. [k] Rev. xiv. 13. [l] Prov. xix. 17.
[m] Luke xiv. 14. [n] 1 Tim. iv. 11.

1. If you would approve yourselves upright before God, fulfil ye this duty—

[Guard against the snares of wealth. Mark the operation and effect of riches upon your mind. See whether they produce a haughtiness of spirit, or a complacency of mind, as if they could afford you any substantial comfort: and beg of God that you may, to your latest hour, be as lowly as the poorest of men, and as dependent upon your God as are the ravens, which subsist by his providence from day to day. Remember, that God is a jealous God; and that a departure from this line of conduct will subject you to his heavy displeasure[m].

God, in having imparted more liberally to you than to others, has conferred on you the distinguished honour of being his almoners: yea, if I may so speak, of being in his place to your more necessitous fellow-creatures: and by your cheerful execution of your trust he will judge of your love to him: for "if you see your brother have need, and shut up your bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in you?" Be then like the Saviour himself, who "went about doing good:" and let it be the joy of your heart so to minister of your abundance to the poor, that "every ear which hears you may bless you, and every eye that beholds you may bear witness to you[n]." If you be essentially defective in this duty, you are destitute of pure and undefiled religion[o].]

2. If you would be accepted of God in the eternal world, be obedient to this command—

[It is remarkable, that in the account which our Lord has given us of the day of judgment, the discharge or neglect of this duty are the prominent grounds of the sentence that shall be passed on the whole race of mankind. Doubtless there will be many other subjects of inquiry: but still the peculiar stress laid on the offices of love sufficiently prove, that whatever else may be brought forward, these must occupy the most distinguished place[p] ——— "Make then to yourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, and go hence, ye may be received into everlasting habitations[q]." "Lay up treasures in heaven, where the bags will never wax old, and where neither rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through to steal[r]." The harvestman scatters, in order to a future harvest: Do ye the same: and know, that "if you sow bountifully, you shall reap bountifully:" but, if you cast your seed with a niggard hand, your harvest will be proportionably small and scanty[s]. In a word, if you are rich in this world, endeavour to be "rich towards God[t];" and so act, that

[m] See Note [t]. [n] Job xxix. 11—13. [o] Jam. i. 27
[p] Matt. xxv. 34—46. [q] Luke xvi. 9. [r] Luke xii. 33.
[s] 2 Cor. ix. 6. [t] Luke xii. 21.

that God himself may bear this testimony to you in the day of judgment; "He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; and his horn shall be exalted with honour[u]."]

[u] Ps. cxii. 9. with 2 Cor. ix. 9.

MLXXXVI.

EFFECTUAL CALLING.

2 Tim. i. 9. *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*

THE deepest truths of our religion were familiar to the mind of the apostle Paul—

He introduced them, on all occasions, as the most forcible motives to obedience[a]—

Amongst us, their practical efficacy is denied, and their importance questioned—

The very maintaining of them is not unfrequently deemed a crime—

But we must not conceal the truth, because some reprobate it as error—

We will state it cautiously; and it will commend itself to all—

In the text, we have ample instruction in relation to *the Christian's calling:* we see,

I. The nature of it—

There is an outward call of the Gospel, which is resisted by many; but that of which the text speaks, is inward and effectual—

It is a call,

1. To salvation as the end—

[If it were only, as many think, a call to outward privileges, it would establish God's right to bestow his blessings on whomsoever he will[b]—

But

[a] The consideration of God's electing love is here urged as a motive to induce Timothy to constancy and perseverance in the path of duty.

[b] If God has a right to confer the means of salvation on some and not on others, he has a right to confer salvation itself. If the one would be unjust, so must the other be; and if the one be admitted, so must also the other.

But the Scriptures represent it as a call to the adoption of children [c], to eternal life [d], to everlasting salvation [e]—

The connexion between salvation and the call, is, as in the text, uniform and inseparable [ee]—]

2. To holiness as the way—

[If holiness were not included in the call, the doctrine of election would certainly be open to insurmountable objections—

But holiness is that to which we are immediately and distinctly called [f]—

It is required of us, not only in general [g], but in this particular view [h]—

It is declared to have been particularly in the mind and intention of God, in our predestination [i], election [k], vocation [l], and in the whole work of his grace upon our hearts [m]—

Our perseverance also in good works was equally in his contemplation [n]—

When our acceptance and salvation are most distinctly spoken of as the end, holiness is carefully stated as the medium through which we attain them [o]—]

The Christian's calling is further to be considered, in reference to,

II. The grounds of it—

Nothing can be more plain than the Apostle's statement: he tells us, both *negatively*, what our calling does not arise from; and *positively*, what it does:

1. It is not founded on our works—

[It cannot be founded on any good works *already done;* for we never had done, or could do any, till we were called by grace—

It could not be founded on good works *foreseen:* for they were to be the fruits of our calling, and therefore could not be the ground or occasion of it—

Had our works, whether done or foreseen, been the proper ground of our calling, we should have had a ground of boasting before God—

Hence God has repeatedly and expressly declared, that they never operated in any respect or degree as inducements with him to confer upon us his converting grace [p]—]

2. It is founded solely on his purpose and grace—

[God

[c] Eph. i. 5. [d] Acts xiii. 48. [e] 1 Thess. v. 9.
[ee] Rom. viii. 30. [f] 1 Thess. iv. 7. Hence it is denominated in the text, "an holy calling."
[g] Heb. xii. 14. [h] 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. [i] Rom. viii. 29.
[k] Eph. i. 4. [l] 2 Pet. i. 3. [m] Eph. ii. 10.
[n] John xv. 16. [o] 1 Pet. i. 2. 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

[God formed his purposes from all eternity[q], and agreeably to them he acts[r]—

In consequence of them we were given to Christ, as his purchased possession[s]—

And a promise of life was given to us in him, and for his sake[t]—

It was in conformity to them that the Jews were made God's peculiar people[u]—

And in conformity to them we Gentiles also are called to a participation of his favour[x]—]

From hence we shall take occasion to answer some important QUESTIONS:

1. How shall I know whether I have been effectually called?

[It cannot be determined by any dreams, or visions, or fanciful experiences—

It can be known only by the fruits which we produce[y]—]

2. What have I to do on the supposition I have been called?

[You are not at liberty to indulge supineness, as though you were sure of heaven at all events—

You should exceed all others in holiness, as much as you profess to surpass them in your prospects—

You should walk worthy of the favours conferred upon you[z], and of the Benefactor who conferred them[a]—]

3. What privileges do I enjoy as one of God's elect?

[Survey the wheels of a watch, and see how, in all their complicated motions, they accomplish one important end—

Thus does all the machinery of the universe, whether more or less connected with men or devils, move in reference to your present and eternal good—

Of this you may be assured; and it may well endear to you the doctrines in the text[b]—]

[q] Acts xv. 18. [r] Eph. i. 11. [s] John xvii. 6. with note [k].
[t] Tit. i. 2. [u] Deut. vii. 6—8. [x] Rom. ix. 11, 16.
[y] 1 Thess. i. 4—10. St. Paul judged by the change wrought in the life and conversation of his converts.
[z] Eph. iv. 1. [a] 1 Thess. ii. 12. [b] Rom. viii. 28.

MLXXXVII.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD A SOURCE OF CONSOLATION.

2 Tim. i. 12. *I know whom I have believed; and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

MAN is born to trouble: and it is of the greatest importance to him that he should know where to turn his eyes in the day of adversity. The Gospel directs us to a reconciled God in Christ Jesus, who has engaged to be our support and comfort under every distress. The Christian has many trials peculiar to himself: but the Gospel is fully adequate to his necessities. Its power to support him may be seen in the passage before us. St. Paul is exhorting Timothy to stedfastness in the cause of Christ[a]: and, for his encouragement, he tells him what was the ground of his own consolations under the heavy afflictions which he was now enduring for the sake of Christ. He tells him, that, notwithstanding he was immured in a dungeon, and in daily expectation of a violent and cruel death, he was neither "ashamed" nor afraid: for that he had a firm persuasion of God's ability to keep him; and that persuasion afforded him ample support.

To illustrate the text, we may observe,

I. The Christian commits his soul to God—

The Apostle doubtless committed unto God the concerns of the Church: but it is rather of his soul that he is speaking in the words before us, because it was *that* which alone could be in danger at the day of judgment. In like manner,

Every Christian commits his soul to God—

[We know what it is to commit a large sum of money to the care of a Banker: and from thence we may attain a just notion of the Christian's conduct. He has a soul which is of more value than the whole world: and he feels great anxiety that it should be preserved safely "against that day," when God shall judge the world. But to whom shall he entrust it? He knows of none but God that can keep it; and therefore he goes to God,

[a] ver. 8.

God, and solemnly commits it into his hands, intreating him to order all its concerns, and, in whatever way he shall see best, to fit it for glory.]

To this he is prompted by manifold considerations—

[*He reflects on the fall of man in Paradise*, and says, 'Did Adam, when perfect, and possessed of all that he could wish, become a prey to the Tempter, when the happiness of all his posterity, as well as his own, depended on his stedfastness; and can such a corrupt creature as I, surrounded as I am by innumerable temptations, hope to maintain my ground against my great adversary? O my God, let me not be for one moment left to myself; but take thou the charge of me; and let "my life be hid with Christ in God:" then, and then only, can I hope, that at the last coming of my Lord I shall appear with him in glory[b].'

He bears in mind also his own weakness and ignorance.—He is conscious that "he has not in himself a sufficiency even to think a good thought;" and that "it is not in him to direct his way aright." Hence he desires to avail himself of the wisdom and power of God; and cries, "Lead me in the right way, because of mine enemies:" "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

But more especially he considers the gracious commands of God.—God has not only permitted, but enjoined, this surrender of our souls to him[c]. O what a privilege does the Christian account it to obey this divine injunction! How thankful is he that God will condescend to accept this deposit, and to take care of this charge! Hence he avails himself of this privilege, and says, "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings!" "O save me for thy mercy's sake!"]

Whilst he acts in this manner,

II. He is persuaded of God's ability to keep him—

He does not merely presume upon God's sufficiency: he is well persuaded of it,

1. From the report of others—

[He is informed by the Inspired Writers, *that God created the world out of nothing; and that he upholds and orders every thing in it;* insomuch that not a sparrow falls to the ground without his express permission. Hence then he argues; 'Did God create my soul, and can he not uphold it? Did he form my enemies also, and can he not restrain them[d]? Has he numbered even the hairs of my head, and will he overlook the concerns of my soul?'

He

[b] Col. iii. 3, 4. [c] 1 Pet. iv. 19. & Isai. xxvi. 20.

[d] See this argument suggested by God himself, Isai. liv. 15—17. *q.d.* "Your enemies are forming weapons; but I formed *them*; and whatever skill they exercise, I will defeat their attempts."

He is told *that God is ever seeking opportunities, not only to exert, but also magnify, his power in his people's cause*[e]. Shall all that vigilance, then, be exercised in vain? or shall any be able to prevail against him?

He is assured also *that God never yet lost one whom he had undertaken to keep:* he never suffered "one of his little-ones to perish[f]." "None was ever plucked out of his hand[g]:" not the smallest grain of wheat, however agitated in the sieve, was ever permitted to fall upon the earth[h]." "The gates of hell have never been able to prevail against his Church." Then, says the Christian, "I will trust, and not be afraid." My Saviour, in the days of his flesh, "lost none that had been given him[i]:" "Whom he loved, he loved to the end[k]:" and therefore I am persuaded he will perfect that which concerneth *me*[l], and "complete in me the good work he has begun[m]."]

2. From his own experience—

[The Christian well remembers what he was by nature; and knows by daily experience what he should yet be, if Omnipotence were not exerted in his support. And hence he argues thus; 'Has God created me anew, and by an invisible, but almighty, influence turned the tide of my affections, so that they now flow upward to the fountain from whence they sprang; and can he not keep me from going back? Has he kept me for many years, like the burning bush, encompassed, as it were, with the flame of my corruptions, yet not consumed by it; and "can any thing be too hard for him?"— — —

These arguments are indeed of no weight for the conviction of others; but to the Christian himself they are a source of the strongest conviction, and of the richest consolation: yea, from these, more than from any others, he is enabled to say, "I *know* whom I have believed."]

Moreover,

III. This persuasion is a strong support to him under all his trials—

Many are the difficulties of the Christian's warfare: but a persuasion of God's ability to keep him,

1. Encourages him to duty—

[The path of duty is sometimes exceeding difficult: and too many have fainted in it, or been diverted from it. But we may see in the Hebrew Youths what a persuasion of God's power will effect. They braved the furnace itself, from the consideration that

[e] 2 Chron. xvi. 9. This is meant by "shewing himself strong."
[f] Matt. xviii. 14. [g] John x. 28, 29. [h] Am. ix. 9.
[i] John xviii. 9. [k] John xiii. 1. [l] Ps. cxxxviii. 8.
[m] Phil. i. 6.

that God could deliver them from it, or support them in the midst of it[n]. And thus will every Christian "encourage himself in God," and "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."]

2. Strengthens him for conflict—

[Under temptations of Satan, or the hidings of God's face, the most exalted Christian would sink, if he were not supported by this hope: "I had fainted," says David, "unless I had believed verily to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." But the thought that the grace of Christ is sufficient for him, will turn all his sorrows into joy[o]: he will chide his dejected spirit[p], and return again to the charge, knowing that at last "he shall be more than conqueror through Him that loved him[q]."]

3. Enables him to endure sufferings—

[Many and great were the sufferings of St. Paul; yet says he, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself." Thus every Christian must "go through much tribulation in the way to the kingdom:" but he learns, not only to bear, but to "glory in tribulation," because it gives him a more enlarged experience of God's power and grace, and thereby confirms his hope, which shall never make him ashamed[r].]

4. Assures him of final victory—

[Those who have not just views of God are left in painful suspense: but they who know whom they have believed, are as much assured of victory, as if all their enemies were lying dead at their feet[s].]

We shall further IMPROVE the subject,

1. For conviction—

[All persons are ready to think that they are possessed of true and saving faith. But faith is not a mere assent to the truths of the Gospel, or even an approbation of them. It includes three things; *A committing of the soul to Christ; a persuasion of his ability to save us; and a determination to go forward in dependence upon him, doing and suffering whatever we are called to in the path of duty.*

Have we *this* faith?———]

2. For consolation—*.

[If there be any amongst us weak and dejected, let them turn their eyes to God as their almighty Friend. Let them know that

[n] Dan. iii. 17, 18. [o] 2 Cor. xii. 9. & Rom. vii. 24.
[p] Ps. xlii. 11. [q] Rom. viii. 37. [r] Rom. v. 3—5.
[s] Compare Isai. l. 7—9. with Rom. viii. 33—39.

* If this were the subject of a FUNERAL SERMON, the excellencies of *the deceased* might here be enumerated, and *the survivors* be comforted by the consideration that THEIR KEEPER lives for ever.

that "He is able to make them stand[t]:" he is "able to make all grace abound towards them, that they, having always all-sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work[u]." It is God himself who suggests to the fainting soul these very considerations; and he requires nothing, but that we wait on him in order that we may experience their truth and efficacy[x] ———

"Now unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen[y]."]

[t] Rom. xiv. 4. [u] 2 Cor. ix. 8. [x] Isai. xl. 27—31.
[y] Jude, ver. 24, 25.

MLXXXVIII.

THE EQUITY OF GOD'S PROCEDURE.

2 Tim. ii. 11—14. *It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself. Of these things put them in remembrance.*

STRANGE as it may seem, it is no uncommon thing for men to arraign the equity of God, and to accuse him of undue severity in the execution of his judgments. The Jewish people of old complained, "The ways of the Lord are not equal:" and God, for his own honour' sake, was constrained to vindicate his character in this respect; which he did in an open appeal to their judgment, and a candid exposition of the modes of his procedure, "O House of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?" 'If a man have sinned and repent, I forgive him: but if he turn back to his former wickedness, I make no account of his temporary reformation, but visit all his iniquities upon his head. Is this unequal? Is it not consonant with strict justice[a]?' In like manner St. Paul declares, in the passage before us, that God will act towards men as they act towards him; requiting with good his faithful servants, and marking the disobedient as objects of his displeasure. And that he may the more deeply impress

[a] Ezek. xxxiii. 17—20.

impress this truth upon our minds, he introduces it with assuring us, that "it is a faithful saying."

From his words we shall be led to consider,

I. The rule of God's procedure in reference to our future destinies—

The whole Scripture declares that he will deal with men according to their works; that "to those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality he will give eternal life; but that to them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there shall be indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, even upon every soul of man that doeth evil[b]."

To this effect we are here told how God will deal,

1. With the godly—

[It is here supposed that the godly will "die with Christ, and suffer with him." And it is true, that all his faithful followers are "crucified with him[c]," and "dead with him." As he died *for* sin, so they, in conformity to him, and by virtue derived from him, die *to* sin: they no longer suffer it to act without controul, as once they did, but they "mortify it in all their members," and "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts[d]." In acting thus, they of necessity condemn the "world around them, who are lying in wickedness[e]," and ordering their course agreeably to the will of Satan, who worketh in them[f], and "leads them captive at his will[g]." In consequence of this, they are hated, reviled, and persecuted, as their Saviour was; and are called to "suffer," even as he suffered. There is not one of them who has not his cross to bear. Times and circumstances may cause a difference as to the degree in which they shall suffer: but there is no exception whatever to that declaration of the Apostle, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution[h]."

Now how will God deal with these? Will he overlook them as unworthy of his notice? Will he afford them no succour, and recompense them with no reward? Far be it from him; for "if we be dead with Christ, we shall also live with him;" that is, he will enable us to execute our holy purposes, and to rise superior to all our spiritual adversaries, even as he did when he rose again from the dead. This is the explanation which St. Paul himself gives us: "If we have been planted in the likeness of his death," says he, "we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this,

[b] Rom. ii. 7—9. [c] Gal. ii. 20. [d] Gal. v. 24.
[e] 1 John v. 19. [f] Eph. ii. 2. [g] 2 Tim. ii. 26.
[h] 2 Tim. iii. 12.

this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. But he that is dead, is freed from sin. Now, if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over him: for, in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord [i]." The same Apostle also gives it as his own actual experience: "We are always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body: for we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh [k]." Thus does the Lord Jesus fulfil the promise which he made in reference to this very point; "Because I live, ye shall live also [l]."

Moreover our God engages, that, "if we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him." Our services shall not be forgotten. There is "a crown of glory prepared for all them that love him [m]:" even on that very throne which Christ himself occupies, shall they be seated with him [n]. Yes: it is a faithful saying, that "they who suffer with him shall also be glorified together [o]."

This then will be the mode of God's procedure towards his faithful people: and according to the same rule will he proceed,]

2. With the ungodly—

[These are here designated as "those who deny him." Now there are *two* ways in which this may be done; namely, either by an open and avowed rejection of his Gospel [p], or by a timid concealment of our convictions. Of the former we shall have no occasion to speak, because it is the latter class only that are referred to in our text; and because all that we shall have occasion to say respecting the latter, must of necessity be in a yet stronger degree applicable to the former: for, if those who do believe in Christ, but through fear of persecution are deterred from confessing him openly, will be disapproved by him, much more will they who impiously blaspheme his name, and pour contempt upon all the wonders of his love and mercy.

Our Lord requires, that we should confess him openly before men. But there are many, who, "when persecution or tribulation ariseth because of the word, are offended [q]," and dare not face the obloquy, or encounter the perils that await them. And how will the Lord Jesus Christ deal with *them?* Will he take no account of their cowardice? Will he be satisfied with *such* a mode of requiting all his love? No: he will deal with them in the way that

[i] Rom. vi. 5—11. [k] 2 Cor. iv. 10, 11. [l] John xiv. 19.
[m] 2 Tim. iv. 8. 1 Pet. v. 4. [n] Rev. iii. 21.
[o] Rom. viii. 17. 1 Pet. iv. 13. [p] 2 Pet. ii. 1.
[q] Matt. xiii. 21.

that they deal with him: "they are ashamed of him; and he will be ashamed of them, in the day that he shall come in the glory of his Father, and of all his holy angels[r]:" "they deny him; and he will deny them[s]." And this is nothing but what they may reasonably expect: for if their love to him is so small, that they will not endure a little shame, or submit to some trifling loss for his sake, how can they expect to be approved as good and faithful servants? How can they suppose it possible that they should partake of that felicity which is reserved for those who fought the good fight of faith, and "loved not their lives unto death[t]?" *This* indeed would be unequal: such inequality shall never be found in the judgments of our God: for "they who loved their lives shall lose them; and they only who are willing to lose their lives for Christ's sake, shall save them unto life eternal[u]."]

That no doubts on this subject may rest upon our minds, I will go on to state,

II. The assurance we have that he will proceed according to this rule—

The declarations of God on these subjects do not obtain the credit they deserve—

[Many of the godly are apt, through the weakness of their faith, to yield to doubts and fears. When feeling the depth of their corruptions, they think it almost impossible that they should ever be able to subdue them: and, when menaced with heavy trials, they doubt whether they shall ever be able to support them.

The ungodly, on the other hand, boldly question whether God ever *can* proceed with them according to his word. They do not hesitate to say, that such a procedure would be cruel and unjust. 'If indeed they were to abandon themselves to all manner of wickedness, they might *then* expect the Divine judgments: but when they can have no gross evils laid to their charge, is it to be supposed that God will punish them to all eternity, merely because they do not (*as they will call it*) make a parade of their religion? *That* is nothing but a conceit of enthusiastic zealots: God is too good to act in such a way, or to visit with such unmerited severity what, at the worst, can only be deemed an excess in the exercise of prudence'———]

But, whether believed or not, they shall all be fulfilled in their season—

["Our unbelief will not make the truth of God of none effect[x]." Whatever he has spoken, he will surely execute; as it is said, "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of

[r] Mark viii. 38. [s] Matt. x. 33. [t] Rev. xii. 11.
[u] Mark viii. 34, 35. [x] Rom. iii. 3.

of man, that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken and shall he not make it good[y]?" Were he to reverse his word for us, he would cease to be a God of truth. He has pledged himself for the accomplishment of every word that he has spoken; and "he cannot deny himself."

True it is, that he is not pleased with the weakness of his people's faith. He complained of it in Peter: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" But he will not on this account neglect to fulfil to them his promises. He has engaged in behalf of those who die unto sin, that "his grace shall be sufficient for them[z];" that "their strength shall be according to their day[a];" and that "they shall be more than conquerors, through Him that loved them[b]." Their doubts and fears will indeed distress their minds, and weaken their efforts, and subject them to many anxieties from which a stronger exercise of faith would have freed them: but still he will not cast them off because they are weak: "he will not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax; but will bring forth judgment unto victory[c]." And in the last day he will recompense into their bosom all that they have done or suffered for him. He will say, "Thou hast been faithful in a few things; be thou ruler over many things[d];" and the precise measure of their glory shall be proportioned to the labours and sufferings to which in this life they had submitted for his sake[e].

In like manner, to the ungodly he will award a sentence of condemnation proportioned to their deserts. It will be to no purpose that they expostulate, and ask, as if aggrieved by his sentence, "Lord have we not in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" He will be altogether inflexible; and will say, "Depart from me; I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity[f]."]

The importance of this subject appears from the solemn charge with which St. Paul enjoins Timothy to "put his hearers in remembrance of it." The same charge is in fact given to every Minister of God's word: "Put your people in remembrance of these things." In compliance with this command I will now proceed yet further to REMIND you of them,

1. For your conviction—

[It is to no purpose to dispute against God. A criminal may

[y] Numb. xxiii. 19.
[z] 2 Cor. 12. 9.
[a] Deut. xxiii. 25.
[b] Rom. viii. 37.
[c] Matt. xii. 20.
[d] Matt. xxv. 23.
[e] 2 Cor. iv. 17.
[f] Matt. vii. 22, 23.

may dispute against human laws if he will, and may determine beforehand that they can never be executed against him. But the only effect of his confidence will be, to deceive his own soul, and to involve himself in irremediable ruin. Let him be ever so assured of impunity, he will not be able to stop the course of the law, or to prevent its execution upon him. How much less then can we suppose that the arm of God's justice shall be arrested, and the very truth of God violated, to rescue a man from perdition, merely because he will not believe that God will fulfil his word. I must declare to you, that all such hopes are groundless: and I call upon you carefully to examine the state of your own souls. Are you "dead to sin," to *all* sin, so that no iniquity whatever is suffered to have dominion over you? ——— Are you openly confessing Christ before men, so that it is seen and known "whose you are, and whom you profess to serve?" Are you "following him without the camp, bearing his reproach [g];" and not bearing it only, but "rejoicing that you are counted worthy to suffer for his sake [h]." In a word, are you Christians, not in word only, but in deed and in truth? These are the inquiries which you must make; for by them alone can you ascertain your state before God. Say not, that, in requiring these things, we require too much: for if God require them, and will receive to mercy those only in whom these requisites can be found, it will be to no purpose to contend with him. Be wise in time: and so endeavour to approve yourselves to God now, that he may approve of you in the day of judgment.]

2. For your comfort and support—

[The workings of unbelief have harassed many who were truly upright before God: and therefore we should not write bitter things against ourselves, merely because we possess not a full assurance of faith. David on some occasions was quite overwhelmed with doubts and fears. Hear his complaints: "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" But whence arose all this? Had it any foundation in truth? No: he immediately acknowledges, "This is mine infirmity [i]." So then do ye say, when doubts and fears assail your minds. Remember, God is a faithful God, and not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail. "Of those whom the Father gave to Jesus, he lost none [k];" nor will he ever lose one: "not the smallest grain of true wheat shall ever fall upon the earth [l];" nor shall one of God's little-ones ever perish [m]." Only commit yourselves to God, and leave the issue of events to him. Your part is to be seeking a conformity to Christ in his death

[g] Heb. xiii. 13. [h] Acts v. 41. [i] Ps. lxxvii. 7—10.
[k] John xvii. 12. [l] Am. ix. 9. [m] Luke xii. 32.

death and resurrection; and his part is to carry on and perfect his work within you. Be ye intent on your part; and leave his to him: and you shall be able at the last to say with Joshua, that "of all the good things which the Lord your God hath spoken concerning you, all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed [n]."]

[n] Josh. xxiii. 14.

MLXXXIX.

THE EARLY KNOWLEDGE OF TIMOTHY.

2 Tim. iii. 15. *From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

IN seasons of heavy trial it is of great advantage to have had a long acquaintance with the holy Scriptures and the principles of religion. A novice is apt to be astonished, and to wonder that a change so favourable as that which he has experienced, ("from a brier to a myrtle-tree [a],") should excite nothing but enmity in those around him. But a person conversant with the word of God, and established with his grace, has counted the cost: he knows what he is to expect: he knows what others have experienced before him: and the very storms which threaten his existence, serve only to confirm him in the truths he has professed. In this view St. Paul encourages Timothy to hold fast the profession of his faith without wavering, and to "continue in the things he had learned," without being intimidated by persecutors, or deceived by seducers [b].

From his words we shall consider,

I. The early knowledge of Timothy—

He was acquainted with the Holy Scriptures—

[By "the holy Scriptures" we must understand, not merely *the words*, but *the doctrines*, of Scripture. Doubtless Timothy was acquainted with our fall in Adam, and the consequent depravity of our nature. He knew also the true scope of all the sacrifices as pointing to that Lamb of God who was to take away the sin of the whole world. Nor could he be ignorant of the necessity

[a] Isai. lv. 13. [b] ver. 12—15.

sity of Divine influences, in order to a renovation of our hearts, and a restoration of the soul to the Divine image.

But it was not *a theoretical* knowledge even of these things which would have satisfied the mind of the Apostle: it must have been *a practical* and *experimental* knowledge of them. He must have felt and bewailed the plague of his own heart: he must have relied on Jesus as his only hope: he must have been renewed in the spirit of his mind by the power of the Holy Ghost: in short, he must have been "a new creature in Christ Jesus," or else the Apostle would never have thought his knowledge a proper ground of congratulation.]

These he knew from a child—

[It is generally thought that children are incapable of understanding the mysterious truths of the Gospel. We readily acknowledge that these truths exceed the capacity, not of children only, but of the wisest philosopher; for "the natural man cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned[c]." But God can give a spiritual discernment to children, as well as to adults; and, supposing this to be given, there is nothing in the Gospel which a child may not understand as well as an adult. Children may have their affections exercised on things proper to call them forth. If God discover to them that they are sinners, and obnoxious to his wrath, they may *fear* his displeasure: if he shew them that he has provided salvation for them in Christ Jesus, they may *hope* in his mercy: if he reveal his pardoning love to their souls, they may *rejoice* in his salvation. The difficulty lies, not in feeling suitable emotions; but in having a practical conviction of those truths which are calculated to excite them. This practical conviction none but God can give; and he is as able to give it to one as to another. Indeed God does prefer those who are babes, in knowledge at least[d], and sometimes also in years; for David says, that "God had ordained strength, and perfected praise out of the mouth of babes and sucklings[e]:" and our blessed Lord made it a matter of joy and thanksgiving, that his heavenly Father had "hid divine things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes[f]." Do we desire instances of early conversion? Josiah sought the Lord at eight years of age[g]. Samuel was devoted to him at a still earlier period of life[h]. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb[i]. But, if there were no other instance upon record, it would be sufficient that we are told, that Timothy knew the holy Scriptures "*from a child.*"]

We

[c] 1 Cor. ii. 14.
[d] 1 Cor. i. 26—28.
[e] Ps. viii. 2. with Matt. xxi. 16.
[f] Matt. xi. 25.
[g] 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3.
[h] 1 Sam. ii. 18, 26.
[i] Luke i. 15.

We shall, with the Apostle, congratulate Timothy, if we consider,

II. The excellency of that knowledge—

It was "able to make him wise"—

[Wisdom is that which is most of all coveted, and for the attainment of which no expense or trouble are accounted too great. Now the wisdom contained in the Inspired Volume infinitely surpasses all that can be collected from other books. It shews us what we were in our original formation, and what we now are. It shews us wherein the chief good consists, and how we may attain it. It shews us every thing, whether good or evil, in its true light, and enables us to form the very same judgment respecting it that God himself does. It teaches us how to fill every station and relation of life to the greatest possible advantage. It even draws aside the veil of heaven itself, and exhibits to us God in all his glorious perfections. It reveals to us the three persons of the Godhead, co-operating in the work of man's salvation, and executing distinct offices for our eternal good. What is all the boasted widom of Philosophers, when compared with this?]

It was able to make him "wise unto salvation"—

[All wisdom that stops short of this is only splendid folly. How vain will the wisdom of philosophers or statesmen appear, when once we are entered into the eternal world! Nothing will then be of any value, but that which led us to the enjoyment of God, and to a meetness for glory. Then the excellency of Scripture knowledge will appear in all its brightness.

But it must be inquired, How is it that the Scripture effects this? Is there any thing meritorious in the knowledge of its truths; or any thing which by its own power can save the soul? The text informs us respecting these things, and points out the precise way in which the Scriptures make us wise unto salvation. Christ is the only Saviour of sinful man. His obedience unto death is the only ground of our hope.

But how are we to be interested in him? There is but one way; and that is, by faith. "He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life."

From hence then it may be seen how the Scriptures make us wise unto salvation. They reveal Christ to us as the Saviour of the world. They commend him to us under every image that can convey an idea of his suitableness to our wants, and his sufficiency for our necessities. They hold forth the promises of God to those who believe in Christ; and encourage us by every possible argument to rely upon him. In this manner they work faith in our hearts: and by that faith we become interested in all that Christ has done and suffered for us.

Thus, in ascribing our salvation to the knowledge of the Scriptures,

tures, we do not derogate from the honour of Christ; since it is only by revealing his work and offices to us, and by leading us to depend upon him, that they become effectual for this blessed end. But at the same time we put an honour on the Scriptures, to which no other book has the smallest claim. Other books may be channels for conveying Divine knowledge; but the Bible alone is the fountain from which it flows. The knowledge therefore of the Bible is of supreme excellence; and the earliest possible attainment of it is of unrivalled importance.]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. The importance of attending to the education of children—

[The generality even of parents are little aware of the benefits which might accrue to children from their early instruction in Divine knowledge. They are anxious enough about the fitting of them for business, or the qualifying of them to appear with advantage among their equals; but they think little about their eternal state. They imagine that the casual information they may gain at school, or at church, will be quite sufficient. Hence it is, that while other knowledge is cultivated and enlarged, every succeeding generation grows up in ignorance respecting their most important concerns. If only the female relatives would take the pains which were bestowed by "Loïs and Eunice[k]," we should see many more possessed of Timothy's attainments.

Parents, remember what a solemn charge is committed to you. If your Ministers must give an account of your souls, so must you of your children's souls. On you perhaps it may depend, whether they shall be made wise unto salvation, or "perish for lack of knowledge." What an awful meeting then will you have with them at the day of judgment, if they perish through your neglect! Have compassion on their souls: at least, have pity on your own. Instruct them diligently: yet be not satisfied with making them wise; but labour and pray that they may be wise unto salvation. Whatever knowledge or accomplishments they attain, you must still "travail in birth with them, till Christ be formed in them[l]."]

2. The guilt of those who are ignorant of the Gospel—

[Two things might, if not excuse, at least extenuate, the guilt of ignorance, provided they could be alleged with truth; the one is, a want of sufficient information; the other is, a want of capacity to receive it. But who amongst us can urge either of these excuses? There is scarcely a corner of this kingdom where the sound of the Gospel is not occasionally heard: and, if it were not, yet have we the Scriptures, which we might read, or procure to

[k] 2 Tim. i 5. [l] Gal. iv. 19.

to be read; and which are able to make us wise unto salvation. And as for capacity, none who have the smallest portion of intellect, can plead a want of that; since the truths of the Gospel, when applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit, are level with the comprehension of a child. Whence then can ignorance proceed, but from an indifference about salvation, and a consequent contempt of Christ? Yes; to this must be ascribed that almost universal darkness which pervades the land: this is the reason, that notwithstanding the light shines, as it were, with meridian splendor, it shines into the hearts of so few amongst us. Tremble then, ye Unbelievers, lest the day should come, when "ye shall seek the Saviour, and not find him;" and lest He whom you now despise, should get himself honour in your destruction.]

MXC.

THE EXCELLENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

LITTLE do men in general think how much they are indebted to God for the possession of the holy Scriptures. This was the exclusive privilege of the Jewish nation for fifteen hundred years: and it elevated them above all other people upon the face of the earth. Their chief advantage, as St. Paul tells us, was, that "unto them were committed the Oracles of God." In the knowledge of these Timothy was early instructed; and "by these he was made wise unto salvation." Doubtless the way of salvation was not so clearly marked in them, as in the Christian Scriptures: but still, to any one who reads the writings of Moses and the Prophets with humility and prayer, there was every needful instruction both in relation to faith and practice. The whole Mosaic dispensation taught him this great lesson, that he must be saved by a vicarious sacrifice, and all the Prophets directed his views to that great Sacrifice, which should, in due time, be offered by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is of these Scriptures that St. Paul speaks in my text; and in the commendation which he bestows upon them, we see,

I. Their

I. Their true origin—

The Scriptures of the Old Testament were "given by inspiration of God"—

[Of this there is abundant evidence, in the very nature of the things which they contain. What could Moses have known about the creation of the world, of the Fall of man, and of the facts relating to the Deluge, if they had not been revealed to him by God? What could he have known of the nature and perfections of God; or of the means by which fallen man was to be restored to his favour; or of the Prophet who should in due time be raised up from amongst his brethren, to be, like him, a Mediator, a Lawgiver, a Redeemer, a Governor? How could he have ever given so perfect a code of laws as those contained in the Ten Commandments; and so complicated a system of ceremonial laws, that should shadow forth, in every particular, the work and offices of the Messiah, together with the privileges and enjoyments of his redeemed people? Or if we suppose a finite creature endued with wisdom sufficient for such a work (which yet cannot for a moment be imagined), it cannot be conceived that he should impose his own inventions on the world as a revelation from God: for if he was a good man, he would never have attempted so impiously to deceive the world; nor, if he was wicked enough to execute so criminal a project, would he ever have given so holy a law, which condemned even the smallest approach to such impiety, and gave the perpetrator of it no hope of ever escaping the wrathful indignation of Almighty God. The miracles wrought by him are a farther confirmation of his divine mission, and of his being inspired of God to declare all which has been transmitted to us in his writings.

Respecting the Prophets also, we may say, that their inspiration of God can admit of no doubt; since it was not possible for them, if uninspired, so minutely and harmoniously to foretell so many events, which all came to pass agreeably to their predictions.]

The same may be said in reference to the writers of the New Testament—

[Whilst the Apostles and Evangelists always refer to the Old Testament as inspired of God, and declare, with one consent, that the writers of it delivered not mere sentiments of their own, but "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost[a]," they profess to be themselves inspired by that same Spirit, in all that they declare; and they wrought miracles without number in confirmation of their word. In what they wrote indeed, they expressed themselves, each in his own peculiar style, as any other writers would have done: but in *the matter* of what they wrote, they were inspired of God; and in *the manner* of expressing it they were preserved by

[a] 2 Pet. i. 19—21.

by that same Spirit from any error or mistake. So that of the whole Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, we may affirm, that God is the Author of them, and that every part of them has been "given by inspiration from him."]

The Apostle proceeds to declare,

II. Their primary use—

This is expressed in four different terms; which yet may properly be comprehended in two. The Scriptures are profitable,

1. For the establishment of sound doctrine—

[They declare all that is needful for us to know: and they lay down every "doctrine" of our holy religion with the utmost precision. At the same time, they enable us to "reprove," or, as the word imports, to *refute*, by the most convincing mode of argumentation, every error, which ignorant or conceited men may labour to maintain. There is such a perfect unity in the system of Revelation, that you cannot overthrow one part, without overturning the whole. Let the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour be denied, and you entirely destroy the doctrine of the Atonement also. Let the influences of the Holy Spirit be denied, and the transformation of the soul into the Divine image must fall with it. Let the merit of good works be maintained, and the whole Covenant of Grace is annihilated. There are indeed matters of less moment, which are less clearly revealed, and respecting which persons of equal piety may differ: but in every thing which is of fundamental importance, we find in the Scriptures the most abundant means of discovering truth, and of refuting error. To them we must on all occasions make our appeal, and by their testimony we must abide.]

2. For the securing of a holy practice—

[Innumerable evils obtain in the world: but every one of them is condemned in the Inspired Volume; whilst, at the same time, the ways of true piety are pointed out with clearness to all who desire to walk in them. There is not so much as a secret evil of the heart which does not find "correction" there, nor any attainment of true righteousness in relation to which we do not find the most explicit instruction. The works of the flesh, and the fruits of the Spirit, are set in contrast with each other, and are portrayed with such exactness, that there is no room left for ignorance to any one who will search the Scriptures, nor for mistake to any one that is truly upright before God.]

From these immediate uses we may easily discern,

III. Their ultimate design—

To render men "perfect," is the great object of God,

God, in all that he has revealed: and *this* the Scriptures are admirably calculated to effect; since they leave nothing wanting, either to Ministers or others,

1. For their instruction—

[We cannot conceive of any good work which a person instructed out of the holy Scriptures is not fitted to perform. Take him as "a man of God," discharging the Ministerial office: he may learn from the Scriptures how to demean himself in the Church of God so wisely and so profitably, that nothing shall be wanting to the edification of his flock. Or, take him as a private individual: take him *in his secret walk with God:* What needs he more than is there contained? What can any man add to the directions there given, or to the examples that are there set before us? or what further light can any creature in the universe desire? Take him *in his conduct towards his fellow-creatures:* What duty is there which is undefined? Let a person occupy any station, or sustain any relation of life, husband or wife, parent or child, master or servant, magistrate or subject, he will equally find such directions as shall leave him at no loss how to please God, or to approve himself to men.]

2. For their encouragement—

[There is not a motive capable of influencing the human mind which is not there suggested and enforced. Not only are the tremendous sanctions of heaven and hell set forth in order to work upon our hopes and fears, but all the wonders of Redeeming Love are there displayed in such majesty and splendor, that no person irradiated with their light can want any thing to increase their constraining influence. Besides, the promises of God contained in this blessed book are so rich, so free, so full, that nothing can be added to them: nor can a man be in any circumstances whatever, wherein suitable provision is not made for his encouragement and support; so that he is not only "furnished for every good work," but assured of success in all that he attempts to execute: if he be called to *act*, he is "able to do all things through Christ who strengtheneth him;" or, if he be called to *suffer*, he is made "more than conqueror through Him who loved him."

Such then being the excellency of the holy Scriptures, let every one of you set himself to discharge his DUTIES in relation to them—

1. Refer every thing to them as your standard—

[Rest not in the opinions of men, whoever those men may be: but bring every thing to the Law and to the Testimony: for, whoever they be, if they speak not according to this word, there is

is no light in them[b]. You cannot but know, that, both in relation to faith and practice, the most grievous errors abound. Bring therefore your sentiments and your conduct to this test. See whether your views of yourself, and of Christ, agree with those which the Scriptures exhibit; and see whether your life, spirit, and conduct, be such as those of the Apostles were. I charge you, before God, to try yourselves by this touchstone. It is not a superficial view of these matters that will suffice. You may easily deceive yourselves; but you can never deceive God: and it is not by any standard of yours that he will try you, but by the standard of his own word. Oh! search and try your ways: "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves:" so shall you have the testimony of a good conscience now, and attain acceptance with God in the eternal world.]

2. Consult them in all things as your guide—

[Difficulties will often arise: and if you go to *man* for counsel, you will most generally be led astray; since none but those who have imbibed the Spirit of the Scriptures themselves, can declare the sublime principles which they inculcate. Study then the holy Scriptures from day to day, and *that* too with a direct view to your conduct; so that on any emergency you may have readily occurring to your mind such passages as are fitted to regulate your judgment, and to direct your paths. "Instructed by them, you will be wiser than your teachers[c]," and will be enabled to "walk wisely before God in a perfect way[d]."]

3. Beg of God, who has revealed them to the world, to reveal them also in your heart—

[Plain as the Scriptures are, they are yet "a sealed book" to all whose eyes have not been enlightened by the Spirit of God. The natural man, how learned soever he may be, cannot enter into their spiritual import, because he has not a spiritual discernment[e]. The Apostles themselves, after all the instruction which they had received, both in public and private, from their Divine Master for above three years, yet needed to have "their understandings opened by him, that they might understand the Scriptures." So do ye need the teachings of God's Spirit, without which you will be in darkness to the latest hour of your lives. Pray then to him, as David did; "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!" Then shall you "be guided into all truth;" and find the Scriptures fully adequate to all the gracious ends for which they have been revealed.]

[b] Isai. viii. 20.
[c] Ps. cxix. 99, 130.
[d] Ps. ci. 2.
[e] 1 Cor. ii. 14.

MXCI.

APOSTACY OF DEMAS.

2 Tim. iv. 10. *Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.*

TO have our minds well established with principles, is doubtless very desirable: but in matters which are confessedly beyond the comprehension of man, we should be modest and diffident in drawing conclusions from them, lest, through an excessive zeal for one principle, we subvert others which are not less true or less important. An inattention to this rule has been productive of incalculable injury to the Church of Christ: for persons giving themselves up, as it were, to some one sentiment, have wrested the Scriptures to make every part of them speak the same language; and have indulged in most acrimonious feelings against all who did not accord with their views. But we should remember, that there are in Revelation, as in all the other works of God, depths which we cannot fathom; and that our true wisdom is, not so much to be making the Scriptures a theatre whereon to display our controversial skill, as to deduce from them the great practical lessons which they were intended to convey. Were we, for instance, to take occasion from the passage before us to argue about the decrees of God, and the final perseverance of the saints, we might dispute well, but it would be to little profit: but, if we enter upon the subject with fear and trembling, and with a view to our own spiritual advantage, we shall find it replete with the most valuable instruction to our souls.

Let us consider then,

I. The fact here recorded—

A more melancholy fact is scarcely to be found in all the Sacred Records. Let us notice,

1. The fact itself—

[Demas was a man of great eminence in the Church of Christ. St. Paul, in the salutations which usually close his Epistles, twice mentions him in immediate connexion with St. Luke;

Luke; "Salute Lucas and Demas." In one of these places he calls Demas one of his fellow-labourers in the work of the Gospel[a]: in the other, after having mentioned Demas with honour, he gives to another Minister, Archippus, a most solemn warning, on account of the lukewarmness which he had manifested in the discharge of his Ministry: "Say to Archippus, Take heed to the Ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it[b]." From hence then we conclude, that he saw no occasion for such an admonition in the case of Demas. Yet behold, we find at last that "Demas had forsaken him," and gone to a great distance from him, and altogether abandoned the work in which he had been engaged. Had we been told, that this servant of Christ had *erred* in some particular, or even that he had *declined in zeal* for his Master's cause, we should not have been so much surprised; because we are aware that the greatest and best of men are but weak, and that there are changes in their spiritual, as well as their corporeal, health: but, when we are informed that he *forsóok* the Apostle, forsook him too in his greatest extremity, when by reason of his imprisonment and approaching martyrdom he needed all possible support; and that, in forsaking the Apostle, he forsook his Lord and Master also; we are confounded, almost as the Philistines were, when they saw their champion dead upon the field.

Seeing the fact, we are eager to inquire into,]

2. The occasion of it—

[Whence could this proceed? To what shall we trace an event so calamitous, so unforeseen? We are not left in doubt respecting it: the Apostle, at the same time that he announces the fact, declares the reason of it: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." Alas! alas! What did he find in this world worthy of his affections? Had he never known any thing of spiritual and eternal objects, we might account for his attachment to the things of time and sense: but we are amazed, that, after having once tasted of living waters, he could ever afterwards find satisfaction in the polluted streams of this world.

But, supposing him to love this present world; is there any thing in that to draw him from Christ, and to make him cast off all concern for his eternal interests? Yes: the love of God and of the world are incompatible with each other; insomuch that, "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him[c]." Light and darkness are not more opposed to each other than are the things of this world, and the things of God. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," what have they to do with heavenly-mindedness? "The person who liveth in pleasure, is dead whilst he liveth[d]:" "the cares and indulgences

[a] Philem. ver. 24. [b] Col. iv. 14, 17.
[c] 1 John ii. 15. [d] 1 Tim. v. 6.

dulgences of this world choke the good seed, and render it unfruitful[e]:" and the seeking honour from men, instead of seeking it from God only, is absolutely incompatible with a saving faith[f]. The cross of Christ, if duly valued, would crucify us unto the world, and the world to us[g].

Here then we see whence this deplorable evil proceeded. Demas had yielded to a concern about his carnal ease and interests. This gradually weakened his anxiety about his spiritual and eternal welfare. Then he became remiss in secret duties: then his strength to resist temptation declined: then his natural corruptions regained their former ascendant over him: then the Spirit of God, being grieved, and quenched, left him to himself: then he became the sport of temptation, and the prey of Satan: and then his abandonment of Christ and of his Gospel followed of course.]

Whilst we mourn over this unhappy man, and lament his apostacy, let us proceed to consider,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

Surely we may learn from it,

1. That whatever attainments any man has made, it becomes him not to be too confident about the issue of his spiritual warfare—

[If we are upright before God, we need not give way to distressing fears: *they* are dishonourable to God, and unprofitable to ourselves. But at the same time we should guard against a presumptuous confidence: for no man knows what a day may bring forth. David previous to his fall might, if told what sins he might commit, have replied with Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do such things?" And Peter, so far from thinking it possible that he should ever deny his Lord, was confident that nothing could ever shake his constancy. So, if Demas, when, in his better state, had been told in what it might end, he would have thought it absolutely impossible that he could ever so "make shipwreck of his faith." Shall *we* then, after seeing the failure of such men, presume to say, "My mountain standeth strong, I shall not be moved?" Let us never forget, that if God withdraw his hand from us for one moment, we shall fall and perish: and let our prayer to him therefore be continually, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." To every man among you, though he were as eminent as St. Paul himself, I would say, "Be not high-minded, but fear[h]." "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall[i]."]

2. That

[e] Matt. xiii. 22. [f] John v. 44. [g] Gal. vi. 14.
[h] Rom. xi. 20. [i] 1 Cor. x. 12.

2. That we must watch with all carefulness against the first beginnings of spiritual decay—

[Had Demas attended to the first encroachments of a worldly spirit, and resisted them as he ought, he had never been left to final apostacy. But the first breach being neglected, an inundation ensued; and the leak being disregarded, his vessel sank. Let me then put you all upon your guard against a decay in your spiritual affections, and an attempt to serve God with a divided heart. From the moment that you embrace the truth, and "put your hand to the Gospel plough, you must not so much as *look* back[k]:" you must "forget all that is behind, and press forward to that which is before[l]." Oh, "remember Lot's wife[m]." Her sin might be thought small: but it was not so in the estimation of her God: and she is made a monument to all future generations. Be "jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy:" and to the latest hour of your lives adopt the habit of St. Paul, who "kept under his body, and brought it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away[n]."]

3. That, if we have unhappily forsaken the Lord, the door of mercy is not yet closed against us—

[Of Demas we know no more than what is here spoken. But of Mark, who is also called John, and who was a companion of Paul and Barnabas in their travels, we do know. He, like Demas, forsook those holy men in a time of danger, and "went no more with them to the work[o]." But God in mercy granted him repentance unto life; so that he not only obtained mercy of the Lord, but became afterwards profitable even to St. Paul himself in the discharge of his Apostolic office[p]. Let not any one therefore despair. Let it be remembered, that as long as we are in the body, God addresses us in these gracious words, "Return, ye backsliding Children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely[q]." Be persuaded then to return to him without delay: for if you return not, it would have been better for you never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to you[r]." But, if you return with penitential sorrow, then shall your Father's arms be open to receive you, and every member of his family give thanks to him in your behalf.]

[k] Luke ix. 61, 62. [l] Phil. iii. 13. [m] Luke xvii. 32.
[n] 1 Cor. ix. 27. [o] Acts xiii. 13. & xv. 38.
[p] ver. 13. *the very verse after the account of unhappy Demas.*
[q] Jer. iii. 22. Hos. xiv. 4. [r] 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

MXCII.

THE GOSPEL PRODUCTIVE OF HOLINESS.

Tit. ii. 11—14. *The grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

WHEREVER Christianity has been professed, the standard of public morals has been raised: and in proportion as it has gained an ascendant over the hearts of men, it has approved itself the friend and parent of good works. That many have perverted its principles, and walked unworthy of them, is true; but this can form no solid objection against the Gospel itself, any more than the abuse of reason or of the blessings of Providence can disprove the benefit of them when rightly used. We will not concede one atom of the freeness or riches of Divine grace; yet will we maintain that the Gospel is conducive to morality: for at the same time that it brings salvation to men, it inculcates every species of moral duty, and enforces the practice of godliness in the most authoritative and energetic manner. This is evident from the words before us; in which we may notice,

I. The character of the Gospel—

The Gospel is supposed by many to be no other than a remedial law—

[The law given to man in Paradise, and republished on Mount Sinai, required perfect obedience. But fallen man can never obtain happiness on those terms. Hence many imagine, that Christ came to publish a new law, suited to our weak and fallen state. They suppose that his death atoned for our past transgressions; and that it purchased for us a power to regain heaven by an imperfect but sincere obedience. Thus they make the Gospel to differ very little from the law. They reduce indeed the standard of the law; but they insist upon obedience to its requirements, as the terms on which alone we are to be saved. They ascribe to Christ the honour of obtaining salvation for us on these favourable conditions; but they make our performance of the

the conditions themselves to be the true and proper ground of our acceptance with God.]

But the Gospel, as described in the text, is widely different from this—

[Such a law as these persons substitute for the Gospel, could not properly be called "grace;" nor could it be said to "bring salvation:" for it does not *bestow* life as a gift, but requires it to be *earned;* and brings only an opportunity of earning it on easier terms. But that Gospel, which in the Apostle's days "appeared to all men," was "a dispensation of grace[a]:" it revealed a Saviour; it directed our eyes to Christ, as having wrought out salvation for us; and it offered that salvation to us freely, "without money and without price."

This is the true character of the Gospel. It is grace, mere grace, and altogether grace from first to last. It brings a free, a full, a finished salvation. It requires nothing to be done to purchase its blessings, or to merit them in any measure. In it God gives all, and we receive all.]

Yet there will be no room to charge the Gospel as licentious, if we consider—

II. The lessons it inculcates—

We have before said, that it requires nothing *as the price of life.* But *as an evidence of our having obtained life,* and in a variety of other views, it requires,

1. A renunciation of all sin—

[By "ungodliness" we understand every thing that is contrary to the First Table of the Law; as profaneness, unbelief, neglect of divine ordinances, &c. And, by "worldly lusts" we understand "all that is in the world, The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life[b];" or, in other words, the pleasures, riches, and honours of the world. All of these are to be "denied" and renounced. As, on the one hand, we are not to dishonour God; so neither, on the other hand, are we to idolize the creature. Nor is it against open transgressions merely that we are to guard, but against the secret "lusts" or desires. The very inclinations and propensities to sin must be mortified. This is indispensably necessary, to prove that we have embraced the Gospel aright: for, "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts[bb]."]

2. A life of universal holiness—

[We have duties to God, our neighbour, and ourselves. Those which relate to ourselves are comprehended under the term "sobriety," which includes the government of all our passions, and the regulation of all our tempers. "Righteousness" fitly expresses

[a] Eph. iii. 2. [b] 1 John ii. 15, 16. [bb] Gal. v. 24.

presses our duty to our neighbour, which briefly consists in this, The doing to him as we would that he, in a change of circumstances, should do unto us. "Godliness" pertains more immediately to the offices of piety and devotion, and marks that respect which we ought to have in our minds to God in all that we do. Thus extensive are the injunctions of the Gospel: it makes no abatement in its demands: it gives no licence to sin: it does not allow us to reduce its requisitions to our attainments; but urges us to raise our attainments to the standard which God has fixed. Nor is it on some particular occasions only that it requires these things: it enjoins us to "*live*" in this way as long we are "in this present world," having the tenor of our lives uniformly and perseveringly conformed to these precepts. Such is that holiness which the Gospel requires, and "without which no man shall see the Lord."]

Sufficient has already been stated to shew the practical tendency of the Gospel. But its tendency will yet further appear from,

III. The motives it suggests—

The instructions which the Gospel affords, are not mere directions, but commands, enforced with the most powerful motives that can actuate the mind of man. Those suggested in the text may be considered as referring to,

1. Our own interest—

[There is a day coming, when our adorable Emmanuel, who once veiled his Deity in human flesh, will appear in all the glory of the Godhead. At that period, all that we have done for God shall be brought to light: and though our good works shall not be the meritorious ground of our acceptance with him, they shall be noticed by him with approbation, and rewarded with a proportionable weight of glory. This is "that blessed hope" which the Gospel has set before us, and to which it directs us continually to "look."

And is not this sufficient to instigate us to holiness? If we kept this in view, how unremitted would be our diligence, and how delightful our work!]

2. Christ's honour—

[At the first appearance of the Lord Jesus, the scope and tendency of his doctrine were shadowed forth in miracles: the devils were cast out by him, and all manner of diseases were healed. But the full intent of his incarnation and death were not understood till after the day of Pentecost. Then the honour of his Gospel was completely vindicated. Then the most abandoned

doned characters were changed: the lion became a lamb; and those who had borne the very image of the devil, were changed into the image of their God. At his next appearing, this will be more fully manifest. Then the lives of all his people will bear testimony respecting the end of his voluntary sacrifice. It will then be seen, beyond controversy, that "he gave himself to redeem us," not merely from condemnation, but from sin; from the love and practice of all iniquity; and to "purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Then "will he see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied:" then also will "the ignorance of foolish men be silenced:" and then will "Christ be glorified *in* his saints, and admired *in* all that believe[c];" for every grace they have exercised will "tend to his praise and honour and glory" in that solemn day[d].

And is not this also a strong motive to influence our minds? Can we reflect on the honour which will accrue to him, when the purifying efficacy of his Gospel shall be seen in all the myriads of his redeemed;—can we reflect on this, I say, and not long to add a jewel to his crown?]

INFER,

1. How little do they know of the Gospel who live in any kind of sin!

[It matters little whether men profess themselves followers of Christ, or not, if they indulge iniquity in their hearts. "Can one born of God habitually commit sin?" No[e]: "we have not so learned Christ, if so be we have heard him, and been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus[f]." The Gospel "teaches us to deny and renounce all sin" without exception. Whoever ye be, therefore, who live by any other rule than the Gospel proposes, know that ye will surely be confounded in the day of Christ's appearing. And the only difference between those who professed, and those who despised, the Gospel, will be, that "they who knew their Lord's will and did it not, will be beaten with the more and heavier stripes."]

2. How happy a world would this be, if all embraced and obeyed the Gospel!

[All kinds of iniquity would be renounced, and all heavenly graces be kept in exercise. There would be no public wars, no private animosities, no wants which would not be relieved as soon as they were known. Evil tempers would be banished: the pains arising from discontent or malice would be forgotten. Peace and love and joy would universally abound. Surely we should then have a heaven upon earth. Let the Gospel be viewed in this light. Let us conceive the whole world changed like the converts on

[c] 2 Thess. i. 10. [d] 1 Pet. i. 7.
[e] 1 John iii. 9. [f] Eph. iv. 20, 21.

on the day of Pentecost; and then we shall indeed confess its excellence, and pray that "the knowledge of the Lord may cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."]

MXCIII.

THE WORK OF THE TRINITY IN REDEMPTION.

Titus iii. 4—7. *After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

THE doctrine of the Trinity must be acknowledged to be deeply mysterious, and utterly surpassing our weak comprehensions. Yet is it so clearly laid down in the Sacred Writings, that we cannot entertain a doubt of its truth. Indeed, without admitting a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, the Scriptures are altogether inexplicable. What interpretation can we put on those words which are appointed to be used at the admission of persons into the Christian Church? —they are to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Here are evidently three distinct Persons, all placed upon the same level, and all receiving the same divine honour: To suppose either of them a creature, is to suppose that a creature may have divine honours paid to him; when we are expressly told that God is a jealous God, and that he will not give his glory to another: and therefore, while we affirm that there is but one God, we cannot but acknowledge that there is, in some way incomprehensible by us, a distinction of persons in the Godhead. This is further confirmed by the manner in which the Inspired Writers set forth the work of Redemption: they frequently speak of it as effected by three distinct Persons, whom they represent as bearing three distinct offices, and as acting together for one end: thus St. Peter says, "We are

are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:" thus also St. Paul, in the passage before us, having represented all men, Apostles as well as others, in a most wretched state both by nature and practice, proceeds, in the words of my text, to set forth the work of Redemption. He begins with tracing it up to *the Father, as the source* from whence it springs: he then mentions the *Holy Spirit* and *Jesus Christ, the one as the Author who procures it, the other as the Agent who applies it*; and then he concludes with declaring that *the glorification of sinful man is the grand end,* for the accomplishing of which the Sacred Three co-operate and concur: "After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

From these words we will take occasion to unfold the glorious work of Redemption, from its first rise to its final consummation; and herein to set before you its original, procuring, efficient, and final cause.

I. Its original cause—

The original cause of our redemption is represented in my text to be "the kindness and love of God the Father." God is love in his own nature; and every part of the creation bears the stamp of this perfection: the whole earth is full of his goodness. But man, the glory of this lower world, has participated the fruits of his kindness in far the most abundant measure; having been endued with nobler faculties, and fitted for incomparably higher enjoyments than any other creature. In some respects, God has loved man more than the angels themselves: for when they fell, he cast them down to hell, without one offer of mercy: but when man transgressed, God provided a Saviour for him. This provision, I say,

was

was wholly owing to the love of God the Father: it was the Father who, from all eternity foreseeing our fall, from all eternity contrived the means of our recovery and restoration. It was the Father who appointed his Son to be our Substitute and Surety; and in due time sent him into the world to execute the office assigned him: and it is the Father who accepts the vicarious sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. He accepts at the hands of his own Son the payment that was due from us, and confers on us the reward which was due to Christ. Thus the Father's love contrived, appointed, and accepts the means of our salvation; and therefore in my text he himself is called "our Saviour;" "the love of God our Saviour." This title belongs more immediately to the Son who died for us: but yet, as the Father is the original cause of our salvation, he is properly called "our Saviour." Nor is it the text only that represents the Father's love as the source of our redemption; the Scriptures uniformly speak the same language: "God so *loved* the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son:" "God *commendeth* his *love* towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us:" and again, "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

This love, however, did not fully appear till after the ascension of our blessed Lord. The text says, "After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man *appeared*." The word in the original refers, I apprehend, to the shining forth of the sun. Now the sun shines with equal brightness when it is behind a cloud, or when this part of the globe is left in midnight darkness; only it is not visible to us till it actually appears above the horizon, or till the clouds that veil it from our eyes are dissipated. So the love of God has shone from all eternity; "He has loved us," says the prophet, "with an everlasting love." But this love was behind a cloud till our Lord had finished his course upon earth; and then it appeared in all its splendor: so that now we can trace Redemption

tion to its proper source; and instead of imagining, as some have done, that the Father was filled with wrath, and needed to be pacified by the Son, we view even Christ himself as the Father's gift, and ascribe every blessing to its proper cause, the love of God.

It is true, however, that much was necessary to be done, before this love of God could shed forth its beams upon us, We proceed therefore to set before you,

II. The procuring cause of our redemption—

This in my text is set forth both negatively and positively: it was not any works of righteousness which we have done, but it was Jesus Christ: they who are saved will no doubt abound in works of righteousness; but these works are not the procuring cause of our redemption. What good works did Adam perform before God promised to send him a Saviour? What good works can any man do, before God endues him with his Holy Spirit? Or even after our conversion, what works of ours can challenge so glorious a reward? Yea, when do we perform any work whatever, which is not miserably defective, and which does not need the mercy of God to pardon it? Every one who knows the spirituality of God's law, and the defects that are in our best performances, will say with the apostle Paul, "I desire to be found, not having my own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ." We may well acknowledge, therefore, as in the text, that we are saved, not by works of righteousness which we have done. The only procuring cause of our salvation is Jesus Christ. Every thing which we receive comes to us on account of what he has done and suffered: if the Father's love appear to us, or if the Spirit be shed forth upon us, it is, as the text observes, "through Jesus Christ." It was his death which removed the obstacles of our salvation: the justice of God required satisfaction for our breaches of the Divine Law: the dishonour done to the law itself needed to be repaired: the truth of God, which

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was engaged to punish sin, needed to be preserved inviolate. Unless these things could be effected, there could be no room for the exercise of mercy, because it was not possible that one perfection of the Deity should be exercised in any other way than in perfect consistency with all the rest. But the death of Christ removed these obstacles. Christ offered himself as an atonement for sin; and at once honoured the law, satisfied justice, and paid the utmost farthing of our debt: thus, "mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other:" yea, by this means, "God is faithful and just, (not to condemn us, but) to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Nor is it in this view only that Jesus Christ procures our salvation: He has taken upon him the office of an advocate, which he is ever executing in heaven: "He ever lives," says the Apostle, "to make intercession for us." He pleads our cause with the Father: He urges his own merits on our behalf: like the High Priest of old, he presents blood, yea, his own blood, before the Mercy-seat, and fills the most holy place with the incense of his own intercession. Thus does he continually prevail for us; and we, for his sake, are loaded with all spiritual and eternal benefits.

That we obtain mercies thus, by virtue of his death and intercession, is evident also from other Scriptures; the Apostle says, that we have Redemption through Christ's blood; and our Lord says, "I will pray the Father, and he shall send you another Comforter:" so that, while we trace back our Redemption to the Father's love, we ascribe it also to the Mediation of the Son.

The third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity also bears his part in this glorious work: We shall proceed therefore to set before you,

III. The efficient cause of our Redemption—

As our salvation is not procured by our own merit, so neither is it effected by our own power: the text informs us, that we are "saved by the washing of

regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."—The washing of regeneration may here refer to the rite of Baptism, whereby we are introduced into the visible Church; and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, to the internal change by which we are made real members of Christ's body; or, they may both mean the same thing, the latter being explanatory of the former; and this I rather suppose to be the true meaning, because they are both put in opposition to the works of righteousness done by us: but, whichever it be, the Holy Ghost is here declared to be the only efficient cause of our salvation: It is He who regenerates us, and makes us partakers of the Divine nature: We are of ourselves dead, and therefore cannot restore ourselves to life: We have only an earthly and carnal nature, and therefore cannot perform the operations of an heavenly and spiritual nature: this is effected only by "the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." We cannot of ourselves secure an interest in Christ, or discern the excellency of those things which he has purchased for us by his blood. We are told, that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, nor can know them, because they are spiritually discerned:" It is the Spirit's office to reveal them to us. Our Lord says, "I will send you the Holy Ghost, and he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you." So neither can we feel the kindness and love of God the Father, unless it be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us. Thus we shall remain ignorant of the Father's love, and uninterested in the mediation of the Son; yea, we shall continue dead in trespasses and sins, if the Holy Ghost do not work effectually in us. Notwithstanding all that the Father and the Son have done for us, we must eternally perish, if we be not renewed and sanctified by the influences of the Blessed Spirit. No resolutions or endeavours of our own will effect the work: nothing less than a Divine Power is sufficient for it: We must therefore experience the agency of the Holy Ghost on our own

hearts,

hearts, or remain for ever destitute of the salvation provided for us.

Under the law, whatever good appeared in the Saints of God, was wrought in them by the Holy Spirit. But they received the Spirit in so small a measure, in comparison of what is vouchsafed to us under the Christian dispensation, that He can scarcely be said to have been given at all till after our Lord's ascension. The Evangelist says, that "the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified:" but from the time of that first effusion of the Holy Ghost, even to this present day, the Holy Ghost has been poured out abundantly, or richly, as the original word means, upon the Christian Church: so that not a few only may expect to feel his influences, but all; even all that will ask for them in Jesus' name.

IV. We come now, in the last place, to speak of the final cause of our Redemption.——The final cause is the end; and, after having seen how the Sacred Three are engaged, we are naturally led to inquire, What is the end proposed? what is it which these Divine Persons intend to accomplish? The text furnishes us with a full and sufficient answer. It tells us, that the final cause for which such wonderful provision has been made, is, that man may be saved; or, in the express words of the text, "that, being justified by faith, we may be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." The justification of sinful man was a concern so dear to God, that he gave his only-begotten Son in order to effect it; and so precious were our souls in the sight of Christ, that he willingly laid down his life for them. The Holy Spirit also cheerfully undertook his part in the economy of Redemption. But it was a free Justification, i. e. a Justification by mere grace, that each Person of the Trinity had in view: they would cut off most effectually all boasting on the part of man, and reserve the whole glory to God alone. They have therefore freely offered it from first to last. The Father freely provided, the Son freely executed, and the Spirit freely applies, that salvation. Nor is

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it merely our justification, but our glorification also, which has been provided for. The Scriptures promise us eternal life, and encourage us to hope for it. They set it forth as an inheritance to which we are constituted heirs: and that, as heirs, we may in due time take possession of it, was the united design of the Three Persons in the Godhead. How astonishing that such an end should ever be proposed, and that such wonderful things should ever be done for the accomplishment of it! Well may we admire the kindness and love of God! well may we stand amazed at the condescension and compassion of the Son! and well may we burst forth into praises and thanksgivings for the grace and goodness of the Blessed Spirit! and indeed, "if we can hold our peace, surely the very stones will cry out against us."

We shall now conclude with a few inferences from what has been said. And,

1. We may see how secure is the salvation of every Believer—

The Three Persons in the Trinity are engaged to each other, as well as unto us. The Father gave his elect to Christ, on condition that he would make his soul an offering for them: and Christ laid down his life, on condition that the Spirit might be sent down into their hearts, to make them meet for his glory. Now we are sure that Christ died for those who were given to him; and that the Holy Ghost will renew and sanctify those for whom Christ died. The only question that can arise is this; Has the Father loved me, and has Christ died for me? To this I answer, We cannot look into the Book of God's decrees, and therefore we can only judge by what is already manifest. Are we regenerated and renewed by the Holy Ghost? if we are, we may be sure that whatever is needful shall be done for us. All that is required of us is, to wait upon God for fresh supplies of his Spirit; and to yield ourselves to the government of that Divine Agent. We then need not fear either men or devils: for none shall pluck us out of the Redeemer's hands; nor shall we have any temptation

without

without a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it. If, however, we have not yet an evidence that we are regenerate, we must not hastily conclude that there is no salvation for us; for all the elect of God were once unregenerate, but in due time were begotten by the Spirit to a lively hope: so that we must still go to God for the gift of his Spirit, and for an interest in Christ: nor will he refuse the petition of any who call upon him in sincerity and truth. But if we have a good hope that we have believed in Christ, then let us rejoice in our security; for, Has the Father shewn such proofs of his eternal love in vain? Has the Son laid down his life for nought? Has the Spirit undertaken such a work, without ability to accomplish it? And is the salvation of our souls the grand end which each of these Divine Persons has had in view, and shall we at last be left to perish? Be of good courage, Brethren! and rest persuaded, with the Apostle of old, that "none shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

2. We may see from hence, how great must be the condemnation of those who continue in unbelief:—

If we reflect a moment upon the most astonishing provision which is made for us in the Gospel, and the dignity of the Persons concerned for our welfare, we cannot but exclaim with the Apostle, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Surely, to despise the kindness and love of God our Father, will greatly aggravate our guilt: to trample on the blood of a dying Saviour, will add tenfold malignity to all our other sins: and to do despite to the Spirit of grace, will render our state hopeless, and inconceivably dreadful. Yet such is the state of all who reject the offers of the Gospel. As for the Heathen, I had almost said, they are innocent in comparison of those who live and die unregenerate in a Christian land. Oh! my Brethren, beware how you bring such aggravated condemnation upon your own souls! St. Paul expressly cautions you respecting this: He says, "He that despised Moses's law died without mercy:" of how much sorer punishment think ye shall

shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the Covenant an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of Grace! Beware therefore lest ye lose this day of grace, and, like the foolish virgins, be shut out from the marriage-supper. Blessed be God! there are none excluded from the Gospel offer: We are commanded to preach it to every creature; and to assure you, that, if you will return to God, there is a way of access opened for you, and that you may at this instant come to him through the Son, and by the Spirit. If therefore you now desire mercy, beg the Holy Spirit to guide you unto Christ; and intreat the Lord Jesus Christ to introduce you to the Father. Nor need you doubt for one moment but that in this way you shall be partakers of everlasting salvation: though you are now dead, and doomed to everlasting death, you shall have spiritual and eternal life: though you are now hopeless, you shall be begotten to a lively hope: and though you are now strangers and foreigners, you shall be heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

Lastly; we see what obligations lie upon every Professor of Religion to abound in good works. The Apostle, in the words immediately following the text, says, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, *that* (*N. B. to the end that*) they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." Now these words are frequently understood as an exhortation to preach about good works; but it is not so: it is an exhortation to preach the very doctrines that I have now set before you; and to preach them *to the end that* Believers may be careful to maintain good works. And indeed it is impossible to conceive stronger motives to an holy life than may be deduced from hence. Did the Father set his love upon us from all eternity, and choose us that we might be an holy people unto himself; and shall we do that which his soul hateth? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? Again—Did Christ undertake to become our surety; and did he actually die for us, in order to redeem

redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works; and shall we take occasion from his death to rest secure in our wickedness? Shall we thus make the Holy One of God a Minister of sin? Again—Did the Holy Spirit engage to renew and sanctify us, and shall we resist all his motions, till we have altogether quenched them? Shall we not rather comply with his solicitations, and cherish his sacred influences? And, once more—Have the blessed Trinity done so much, on purpose to make us heirs of eternal glory; and shall we to the utmost of our power thwart the Divine counsels, and reject the proffered mercies? Oh, no! let us rather feel the obligations that are laid upon us: let us say with the Psalmist, What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me? and let us endeavour to abound in good works, not that we may be saved by them, but that we may please Him who hath called us unto his kingdom and glory.

MXCIV.

THE TRUE WAY OF PROMOTING GOOD WORKS.

Tit. iii. 8. *This is a faithful saying; and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works: these things are good and profitable unto men.*

ONE of the principal ends of a Christian Ministry is, to stem the torrent of iniquity, and to meliorate the moral habits of mankind. If this be not attained, nothing is done to any good purpose. The mysteries which may be opened might as well be concealed: the arguments which may be urged might as well be suppressed. No glory can be brought to God, no benefit be secured to man, but through a moral change wrought upon the hearts and lives of men. In this, all are agreed. Even the profane, who neither regard nor practise one moral duty, will acknowledge this.

But then a question arises; "How shall this end be

be obtained?' Upon this question there will be a great diversity of sentiment. The general answer would be, 'Preach upon good works; inculcate the value and importance of them; trouble the people as little as possible about the doctrines and mysteries of religion; and labour principally, if not exclusively, to establish good morality.' Unhappily for this land, this sentiment has in past times been too generally adopted. There may be some indeed (we trust they are very few), who run to a contrary extreme, and dwell upon doctrines to the utter exclusion of good works: but, a very great part of the Christian world imagine, that the inculcating of Christian principles is of but little use in the production of morals: and hence it is that the peculiar doctrines of our religion have so small a share in our public Ministrations. Many will even quote the words of our text as sanctioning this practice, and as enjoining Ministers to dwell principally upon the subject of good works. But the text, properly understood, has a directly opposite aspect: it is an express injunction to Titus to bring forward continually the leading doctrines of our religion, *in order to*[a] lead men to the practice of its duties.

Following his instructions, we propose to shew,

I. What subjects a Christian Minister ought chiefly to insist upon—

The things which St. Paul "willed us constantly to affirm," are those which are specified in the foregoing context: they are,

1. The extreme degeneracy of our nature—

[What St. Paul speaks of himself and of all the other Apostles in their unregenerate state, is equally true of us[b]: whether we look around us, or within us, we shall see that the representation is just. The foregoing part of it characterizes us at all times: the latter, whenever suitable opportunities are afforded us for displaying the feelings of our minds. The evil principles are within us, whether exercised or not: they may sleep, and thereby escape notice; but they are easily roused, and ready to act the very moment that an occasion arises to call them forth.

Now men like to have these humiliating representations kept out of sight: they love to hear flattering accounts of their own praise-

[a] *That to the end that.* [b] ver. 3.

praise-worthy conduct and amiable dispositions. But we must declare to them what God has declared to us; and what we know by bitter experience to be true. If we neglect to shew them these things, how can we hope that they should ever be brought to repentance? If they know not the depth of their own depravity, they can never be duly humbled for it, and consequently can never receive aright the consoling doctrines of the Gospel.

On these things then we must insist; and respecting the truth of these things we must "constantly affirm."]

2. The means which God has used for our recovery—

[In the fulness of his heart St. Paul expatiates upon the wonders of Redeeming Love[c]. He traces all to the free, the rich, the boundless mercy of Jehovah; who, in execution of his eternal counsels, has, for Christ's sake, poured out his Spirit upon man, in order to renew his nature, and to fit him for glory. In short, he traces the salvation of man to three united causes; the Father's love, the Son's merits, and the Spirit's influence.

One would suppose that these subjects should be the most welcome of all that can be presented to our view. But this is not the case: for, however great the encouragement that is derived from them, they all have an humiliating tendency: they shew us the depth of our misery, that called for such a remedy: they constrain us to acknowledge our obligations to the grace and mercy of God, and our entire dependence on the merits of his Son, and the influences of his Spirit. On these accounts men would rather be amused with moral essays, than instructed in these mysterious truths.

But we must "affirm these things;" we must affirm them "constantly;" for they are "faithful sayings," and truths in which our everlasting welfare depends. To make these known, and understood, and felt, should be the great object of all our labours.]

That we may not be thought to lay too great a stress on these subjects, we shall shew,

II. Why they deserve so great a portion of our attention—

The Apostle assigns reasons the most satisfactory imaginable:

1. They are the appointed means of promoting good works—

[It is a lamentable but undoubted fact, that where morals only

[c] ver. 4—7.

only are insisted on, or where the foregoing doctrines are but occasionally stated, the great mass of the people are ignorant of the fundamental truths of our religion, and their morals rarely experience any visible or important change. Nor can we wonder at this, if only we consider, that God has appointed other means for the reformation of mankind; and that the means he has appointed, are alone suited to produce the end.

Is it asked, "Whence the stating of Christian doctrines should work so powerfully, while the pressing home of moral duties fails to produce any such effects?" we answer, That God will bless the means which are of his own appointment, when he will not prosper those which are substituted in their place; and, that there is in the doctrines before stated a natural and proper tendency to produce a change both of heart and life. Suppose a person truly to receive what God has declared respecting the extreme degeneracy of our nature; can he fail of being humbled in the dust? Can he do otherwise than stand amazed at the forbearance of God towards him? Can he refrain from saying, 'O that I could serve my God with as much zeal and diligence as ever I exerted in violating his commands?' Suppose him then to receive all the glorious truths relative to the way of salvation; will he not be filled with admiring and adoring thoughts of God's mercy? Will not "the Grace of Christ," and "the love of the Spirit," constrain him to cry out, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" Yes; let him only be penetrated with a sense of what God has done for his recovery, and he will not only "be careful to maintain," but studious to *excel*[a] in, good works: he will not be contented to conform to the world's standard of morality, but will seek to become pure as God is pure, and "holy as God is holy."]

2. They "are good and profitable unto men"—

[This expression of the Apostle may be understood either of the doctrines of Christianity, or of the good works produced by them, or (which we rather prefer) of both together.

Who must not acknowledge the excellence and utility of *the doctrines?* We confidently ask, What has reformed the world, as far as any change has taken place in its habits? Have the dogmas of philosophers produced this effect; or has it been wrought by the influence of Christianity? Let any one contemplate the change that took place upon the Converts on the day of Pentecost; let him see the odoriferous myrtle starting up in the place of the noxious brier, and say whether these doctrines be not "good and profitable unto men?" Or let the appeal be made to living Christians: are there not many that must say, 'Before I heard those doctrines I was altogether earthly, sensual, and devilish; but from the moment that I received those doctrines into my heart, I have experienced a total change of character:

[a] προϊστασθαι.

character: my spirit and temper have been wonderfully improved; my desires and pursuits have been altogether altered; I am become quite a new creature: now also my peace flows down like a river; death has been disarmed of its sting, and I look forward to the eternal state with unspeakable delight?'

That *the good works* which are produced by these doctrines are also beneficial, we gladly affirm. As for the works that are unconnected with these doctrines, they are neither good nor profitable unto men; because they are essentially defective both in their principle and end: but the works that flow from them are both "good and profitable:" they are truly "good," because they proceed from love to God, and from an unfeigned desire to promote his glory; and they are "profitable," because they are evidences to us of our own sincerity; they bring peace and joy into the soul[e]; they advance our meetness for heaven; and they increase that eternal weight of glory which shall be given us in exact proportion to the number and quality of our works[f]. Let not any one imagine, that, by dwelling on the *principles* of religion, we mean to disparage its *fruits*: no: only let the fruits proceed from love to God, and a desire to promote his glory, and they cannot be spoken of too highly: the smallest service performed in such a way, shall in no wise lose its reward.]

Hoping that the giving to the doctrines of Christianity a considerable share of our attention is vindicated to your satisfaction, we conclude with two words of ADVICE:

1. Meditate much and deeply on the fundamental principles of our religion—

[If it be the duty of Ministers constantly to set before you the leading truths of Christianity, it must doubtless be your duty constantly, as it were, to revolve them in your minds. It is on them that you are to found your hopes: from them, you are to derive your motives and encouragements: through them, you will receive strength for the performance of all your duties. It is by them that you are to be brought to believe in God, and, "*having believed in God*," to be made careful and diligent in all good works. Let them therefore be your meditation day and night, and you shall find them "sweeter than honey, or the honeycomb," and "dearer than thousands of gold and silver."]

2. Display the influence of those principles in your life and conversation—

[If you dishonour your profession, the ungodly world will take occasion from your actions to vilify your principles, and to represent your misconduct as the natural effect of our preaching: If

[e] Isai. xxxii. 17. [f] 2 Cor. v. 10.

If they would argue so in their own case, they would do well: for their disregard of all the higher duties of religion does indeed arise from their contempt of its doctrines. But the experience of the primitive saints, and of thousands that are yet alive, sufficiently refutes the idea of our principles tending to licentiousness. However, be careful that you do not give to your adversaries any occasion for such reflections. Shew them, that the doctrines you profess, are "doctrines according to godliness:" The light of holiness will do more than ten thousand arguments to stop the mouths of gainsayers, and to recommend the Gospel to their acceptance. "Shew them therefore your faith by your works;" and constrain them to acknowledge, that you by your principles are enabled to attain a height of holiness, which they shall in vain attempt to emulate.]

MXCV.

THE EFFICACY OF THE GOSPEL.

Philem. 10, 11. *I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me.*

THE Inspired Volume certainly differs in many respects from what we might have expected. We should have supposed, that it would contain only such things as could not be known except by revelation. But, behold, here is a letter, written to a single individual, on a subject which might occur at any time or place; a letter, containing no particular point of doctrine, but simply requesting a master to receive with kindness an offending, but repentant, slave. It should seem strange, I say, that such an epistle should be dictated by inspiration, and be preserved for the edification of the Church to the end of time. But so it is: and an attentive consideration of its contents will soon convince us, that it is worthy of its Divine Author. We must never forget, that the Word of God is intended to regulate our spirit and conduct in every situation and relation of life: and, in this view, the epistle before us possesses a transcendent excellency: for, though it does not state particularly any of *the doctrines* of the Gospel, it does shew us in a very impressive manner,

I. *The*

I. *The spirit which it breathes*, where its influence is complete—

"I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds." Let us here mark,

1. The interest which the Apostle took in the welfare of Onesimus—

[Onesimus was a slave belonging to Philemon, who was a person of eminence, perhaps a Minister, in the Church at Colosse*. He had fled from his master, having, it should seem, first robbed him; and had come, many hundred miles off, to Rome; where he conceived he should be perfectly out of the reach of his master's inquiries. It happened that at that time Paul was a prisoner at Rome; yet, though a prisoner, was permitted to see, and to instruct, all who came to him. Onesimus, probably from curiosity, went to see and hear this famous servant of Christ; and, through the special grace of God, was converted under his Ministry. He soon made himself known to Paul; and, approving himself a sincere convert to the faith of Christ, ingratiated himself into the favour of the Apostle, who received and loved him as a son. In truth, he was now, in a spiritual sense, his son; since, by the Ministry of the Word, the Apostle, as it is expressed, had "begotten him in his bonds." The Apostle now desired to restore him to the favour and protection of that master whom he had so greatly injured: and for that end he wrote this epistle to Philemon, and sent it by the hands of Onesimus himself: for he judged, that no man can be a true penitent without making restitution to all whom he has wronged, and asking pardon of all whom in any great degree he has offended. He judged this to be necessary, as well for the peace and comfort of Onesimus, as for the honour of God and his Gospel: and therefore, notwithstanding the loss of his kind attentions would be severely felt by the Apostle, he would on no account retain him at Rome, but sent him back to his master, Philemon, at Colosse.]

2. The exquisite delicacy with which he pleaded his cause—

[In point of delicacy of feeling and sentiment, this epistle has not perhaps its equal in the world. Some of its leading features we will proceed to notice.

The Apostle's object was, so to break the matter to Philemon, as not to shock his feelings; and so plead the cause of Onesimus, as to procure for him a favourable reception. Hence arose a necessity for touching every point with tenderness and delicacy; which the Apostle proceeded to do, not by rules of art, (though the most consummate wisdom could not have devised any plan more

* ver. 1, 2.

more appropriate than that which is here pursued,) but by the simple dictates of love.

He begins with acknowledging Philemon's eminence both in faith and love; and with declaring, what exquisite joy he felt, both in the accounts which he had heard of him, and in remembering him before God in his daily supplications[b]. This had a tendency to disarm Philemon, if he felt any bitter resentment against Onesimus; for he could not well indulge hatred, when he himself experienced so much love.

The Apostle then proceeds, in the language of meek intreaty, to request Philemon's pardon in behalf of this returning slave. He reminds Philemon, that, as he himself, no less than Onesimus, had received the truth by means of his Ministry, he might well assume the authority of a father, and *require*, rather than *request*, the performance of so plain a duty: but he chose rather to intreat as a favour, as a favour to him who was now "grown old" in the service of his Lord, and was "a prisoner too for the truth's sake," that he would be reconciled to Onesimus, whom the Apostle himself regarded as a son[c]. How could such a request as this, a request from such a person, under such circumstances, be refused? Methinks, it was not possible for Philemon, however indignant against Onesimus, to reject a petition offered by his own spiritual father, in such terms as these.

He goes on to remind Philemon, that Onesimus, who had hitherto but ill deserved that name[d], since he had been so unprofitable, would henceforth act a more worthy part, and be indeed profitable, in whatever capacity he should be employed. This consideration would not be without its influence; more especially as the Apostle speaks of himself as having been materially benefited by the services of Onesimus, as Philemon himself would in all probability be in future[e].

He then suggests a thought, which must of necessity produce a great effect upon Philemon's mind. Philemon, being himself an eminent servant of Christ, could not but know that God has formed his purposes from all eternity; and that, if any be converted to the faith of Christ, it is in consequence of God's electing love, who has ordained the time, the means, the manner, and every thing respecting his conversion, from all eternity. Now, says Paul, Who can tell? Perhaps all that Onesimus did, and whereby he so justly provoked thy displeasure, was, in the counsel of God, ordained to be the means whereby he should be converted to the faith of Christ; and, though not in his own intention, yet in the intention of an unerring God, "he therefore departed for a season, that thou mightest receive him for ever, not now as a servant, but above a servant,

[b] ver. 4—7. [c] ver. 8—10.

[d] Onesimus means *profitable*: and it is in reference to the import of his name that the Apostle speaks. [e] ver. 11—14.

vant, a brother beloved[f]?" This would in no respect excuse the wickedness of Onesimus, any more than God's intention to redeem the world would excuse the murderers of the Lord Jesus. Onesimus was a free agent in all that he did: but perhaps God had seen fit to leave him to the wickedness of his own heart, in order that he might thus be brought under the Ministry of Paul, and have the grace of God the more abundantly magnified in his conversion, and in the whole of his future life. How effectually would such a thought as this engage a pious mind, like that of Philemon's, to co-operate with God, and to advance to the uttermost the purposes of his grace!

Lest the recollection of the losses sustained by means of Onesimus should rankle in Philemon's mind, the Apostle further adds, that whatever Onesimus might owe him, he (Paul) would most gladly undertake to pay; though he did not much expect that such a demand of pecuniary compensation would be made upon him, by one who owed to him what was of more value than the whole world, even his own soul[g].

Finally, as though he were pleading for his own life, and all his happiness were bound up in the obtaining of this request, he intreats, "If thou count me a partner, (a partaker of the same salvation with thyself,) receive him as myself[h]." "Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord;" for they are all in commotion whilst his acceptance with thee is in suspense; and nothing but thy compliance with my request can *give them rest*[i].

Now the point which I wish to be noticed here, is, not *the line of argument* merely, but *the delicacy of the sentiment*, and *the exquisite address* with which the Apostle seeks to attain his end. This, if it had been the effect of art, would have gained our admiration: but, as the effect of Christian principle, and Christian love, it is edifying in the highest degree, inasmuch as it shews what a spirit the Gospel breathes, and what genuine Christianity will universally inspire[k].]

From the account which the Apostle gives of Onesimus, we are led to notice,

II. *The change which it operates* where its influence is begun—

"Onesimus," says the Apostle, "was in time past unprofitable, but now will be profitable both to thee and me." The state of every man previous to his conversion may be said to be unprofitable, because he

[f] ver. 15, 16. [g] ver. 18, 19. [h] ver. 17.
[i] ver. 20. This is the force of the word ἀνάπαυσόν.
[k] Observations might have been made also on ver. 21, 22. But enough is here said to illustrate the point in hand.

he does not answer the true ends of his creation: he does nothing for God, nothing for the Church, nothing for his own soul. But no sooner will Divine grace reach his heart, than he will endeavour to be serviceable,

1. To the Church of God generally—

[Onesimus, having received the truth in the love of it, instantly set himself to work, if by any means he might render service to the Apostle in his confinement. Doubtless such a servant, at such a juncture, was an unspeakable comfort to the Apostle, and would greatly alleviate the pains and sorrows of his imprisonment. And, no doubt, whatever Onesimus was able to do, he did with great delight, not shrinking back from the horrors of a prison, nor intimidated by the sufferings inflicted on St. Paul, but rejoiced to have an opportunity of testifying his love to one, who had been such an instrument of good to his own soul.

Now here we see, what every true convert will do. He will begin to inquire, 'How can I co-operate with my Minister in his labours of love? How can I strengthen his hands? How can I encourage his heart? What can I do, either to shew my love to him, or to impart to others the benefits which I myself have received? Can I assist in any way in visiting the sick, in instructing the ignorant, in relieving the needy, in teaching the rising generation? Whether my talents be more or less, I am determined that they shall not be wrapped up in a napkin, but be diligently improved for my God. Freely I have received; and I will freely give.' Yes, Beloved Brethren, how unprofitable soever a man may have been in times past, he will not willingly be so any longer, but will be profitable to his Minister; and to the Church of Christ, as far as his ability will admit.]

2. To those who have a more immediate claim upon him—

[Onesimus would henceforth be "profitable to his master Philemon." Oh! in what a different spirit would he serve his master now! We apprehend indeed that Philemon instantly gave him his liberty; and that he immediately became an assistant in the Church of Colosse, to whom St. Paul gave him a most satisfactory testimonial[1]: but, if he had continued in the service of Philemon, we can have no doubt but that he would have justified the character given of him by St. Paul, and proved truly profitable to his master. And herein Divine grace will be sure to shew itself: it will lead us to fill up our station in life, whatever that station be, with the utmost care and diligence. Are we servants? we shall regard our master as placed over us by the Lord himself, and

[1] Col. iv. 9.

and shall do him service as unto the Lord. Were we even slaves, we should fulfil our duties as unto God himself, who has appointed us our lot, and who requires that we execute with fidelity the work he has assigned us. It is often made a matter of complaint indeed against religious servants, that they are idle, and impatient of reproof. And glad should I be, if there were not too much reason for this complaint. But let not this evil be imputed to religion; for religion condemns it utterly: the Gospel gives no sanction to such conduct, nor any occasion for it. It requires that servants demean themselves with modesty and humility; and not towards kind masters only, but towards such as are harsh and severe[m]: and it especially enjoins, that they fulfil all their duties, "not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as unto God, doing the will of God from their hearts[n]." Let it be remembered then, that the true and proper tendency of the Gospel is, to improve us in every station and relation of life: and that, if it operate not this change in our hearts and lives, we have never received it as we ought[o].]

LEARN then from hence,

1. To abound in all acts and offices of love—

[Who does not admire the character given of Philemon, whose love was such as to attract the notice of all, and constrain them to acknowledge the abundance of the grace bestowed upon him, whilst, by his kindness and liberality, "the bowels of the saints were so greatly refreshed[p]?" And who does not admire the interest which the Apostle took in the welfare of a poor slave who had run away from his master? Such, Beloved, are the offices in which we should delight. None on earth are so low or abandoned, but they deserve notice from us, and should be objects of our pity and compassion. I call upon you then, if there be any, whom by your instructions you may restore to God, or by your kind offices you may reconcile to man, to engage in the good work with all your heart, and to labour to the uttermost to diffuse the blessings, which are the sure result of faith and love.]

2. To bring men, if possible, under the sound of the Gospel—

[See the effects produced on this worthless character. Worse than unprofitable had Onesimus been: but, by the hearing of the Gospel, he was turned to God. Of whom will you despair? Who will not lay down the weapons of his rebellion, when God speaks with power to his soul? It may be that a person is hardened under the Gospel, even as Onesimus was: for we cannot doubt but that the pious Philemon had endeavoured to watch over his domestics: but in vain had all *his* instructions been.

[m] 1 Pet. ii. 18. [n] Eph. vi. 5—8. [o] Tit. ii. 11, 12. [p] ver. 6, 7.

been. Not so the instructions of the Apostle Paul, when accompanied with a Divine power to his soul: *Then* he became a new creature; and, though a slave of man, was made a freeman of the Lord: so may it be with those whom *you* may bring to attend where Christ is preached. God may meet them, as he did Onesimus. Many who, like Zaccheas, have thought of nothing but gratifying a foolish curiosity, have been made to obey the voice of Christ, and have found salvation come unto their souls. If one such instance occur through your instrumentality, you will have "saved a soul from death, and hid a multitude of sins[q]."]

3. To bear in mind your own obligations to your great Advocate and Intercessor, Jesus Christ—

[Doubtless Onesimus would long remember his obligations to St. Paul. But what were they in comparison with what you owe to the Lord Jesus Christ? Think how you have cast off the yoke of Almighty God, and robbed him of all the service to which he was entitled, and gone to a distance from him, that you might live as "without God in the world." Think how the Lord Jesus Christ has instructed you, and brought you to the knowledge of salvation, and restored you to the favour of your offended God. Think how he has not merely offered to pay your debt, but has actually discharged it. Yes; "of him it was exacted," says the Prophet, "and he was made answerable[r]:" and he "laid down his own life a ransom for you." To his continual intercession too are you indebted for all that peace which is maintained between God and your souls. Will you not then be thankful to him? or rather, shall there be any bounds to your gratitude? Bless him then, and adore and magnify him, and call upon all that is within you to bless his holy name. And now endeavour to be "profitable to him." Consecrate to him all your faculties, and all your powers. Live for him: die for him, if need be; and begin now the song, in which you shall, ere long, join all the choirs of heaven: "To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and our Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen[s]."]

[q] Jam. v. 19, 20.
[r] Isai. liii. 7. The marginal translation.
[s] Rev. i. 5, 6.

MXCVI.

THE EXCELLENCY OF CHRIST'S PERSON AND GOVERNMENT.

Heb. i. 8. *Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.*

IN the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle's main object is to shew, that the Jewish ritual was completely fulfilled in Christ, and was therefore superseded by the Christian dispensation. But before he comes to the argumentative part, wherein this subject is regularly discussed, he shews how great and glorious a person Christ was: for, as the Jews had a high regard for Moses, and as they had received their law from God, it was necessary that they should be informed who Christ was; that he was greater than Moses, yea, than the very angels in heaven; and that therefore he had full authority to introduce the religion which was now established amongst his followers, and which the Jews were every where called upon to embrace. This, however, he takes care to ground upon their own Scriptures. He speaks of nothing as now, for the first time, revealed to himself; but appeals to the writings of their own prophets, in proof of every thing that he asserts.

The Psalm from whence the text is cited, relates chiefly to the Messiah. Whatever relation it may have to Solomon, it confessedly cannot be altogether applied to him. The antient Jews understood it as speaking of the Messiah: and of the propriety of applying it to him, there can be no doubt. The words before us are addressed by the Father to the Messiah: and they lead us distinctly to notice two things; namely,

I. The dignity of his person—

Many there are, both Jews and Christians, who deny that the Divinity of Christ is here asserted—

[Jews have said, that the word Elohim is applied in Scripture to creatures, and therefore cannot be justly interpreted as importing

ing the proper Deity of the person to whom it is addressed. But to this it may be observed, that though the word Elohim is applied to magistrates *officially*, as representatives of the Deity, it is no where applied to any individual but to Jehovah himself; and that to apply it to any individual besides Jehovah would be blasphemy.

But Christians also have attempted to invalidate the testimony of the Apostle, as the Jews have of the Prophet; and for that purpose would translate the words thus; "God is thy throne for ever and ever." But this is to force the words from their plain and obvious meaning: nor will it answer the end which they would endeavour to attain: for the very next quotation from the Psalms asserts the Divinity of Christ, as clearly as the text itself does; speaking of him as the Creator of all things, and as continuing immutably "the same" for ever and ever[a]: and just before the text, another passage is cited from the Psalms to the same purpose, saying, "Let all the angels of God worship him[b]." We may safely therefore affirm, that the Messiah (who is here called "the Son,") is addressed as truly and properly "God."]

But the doctrine of his proper Deity, whilst it is asserted here, pervades also the whole Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament—

[The very name Emmanuel was assigned him on this account, because he was "God with us." Yes, verily, he is "Jehovah's fellow[c]:" even "the mighty God[d]; "Jehovah our righteousness[e]." Nor does the New Testament leave this in doubt: for it asserts him to be "God manifest in the flesh[f]," even "the great God and our Saviour[g]," "God over all blessed for ever[h]."]

And this doctrine lies at the root of all our hopes—

[The whole scope of this Epistle is to shew, that what the blood of bulls and goats could not do, the blood of Christ, as shed upon the cross, has effected; namely, that it has made a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. But is it the blood of a mere creature that could effect this; If Christ be a mere creature, what force is there in that argument of the Apostle, "If the blood of bulls, &c. sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, &c. purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God[i]?" What sense would there be in this, "If the blood of one creature could effect the smallest thing, *how much more* shall the blood of another creature effect the greatest?" But if Christ be God as well as man,

[a] ver. 10—12. [b] ver. 6. [c] Zech. xiii. 7.
[d] Isai. ix. 6. [e] Jer. xxiii. 6. [f] 1 Tim. iii. 16.
[g] Tit. ii. 14. [h] Rom. ix. 5. [i] Heb. ix. 13, 14.

man, then is the argument clear, and worthy of an inspired Apostle. In a word, if Christ be not God, he cannot be the Saviour revealed in the Old Testament: for of him it is expressly said, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour: there is none beside me[k]."]

But it is not so much of the essential, as of the mediatorial, dignity of Christ, that the text speaks: for it immediately proceeds to mark,

II. The excellency of his kingdom—

Earthly kingdoms are but of a limited duration: and, from the imperfection of all human institutions, there must of necessity be something in them of partiality, and of comparative oppression. But Christ's kingdom is perfect in every respect: it is,

1. In its duration perpetual—

[The four great monarchies all found a termination of their power[l]: but the kingdom which Christ has established, shall endure for ever[m]. True it is, that the present mode of administering it will cease, when there are no more subjects to be governed, or enemies to be subdued. When the final judgment is passed, the enemies of the Messiah's kingdom will all be shut up in the prison prepared for their reception; and his subjects be exalted to those regions, where their every want will be supplied. "Then the Son will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all[n]." Still, however, the kingdom itself will remain: and Christ, as its glorious Head, be acknowledged by all his subjects, as the one Source of their happiness, the one Author of their salvation[o].]

2. In its administration just—

[His sceptre is a sceptre of righteousness." Every law that proceeds from him is "holy, and just, and good." Nothing of imperfection is found in any one of them: they are alike incapable of diminution or addition. If any one law appears too strict, it is only through our own ignorance and love of sin. To the renewed soul, not one of his commandments is grievous: the only thing that is grievous to it is, that it is not able to obey them all more perfectly. The very tendency of every law is to make those happy who obey it: and were any man to obey the laws of Christ as perfectly as they do in heaven, he would already in his own soul possess a heaven upon earth. Let any one who is disposed to complain of the strictness of the Gospel, examine

[k] Isai. xlv. 21, 22.
[l] Dan. ii. 37—41.
[m] ib. ver. 44. & vii. 13, 14.
[n] 1 Cor. xv. 24, 28.
[o] Rev. v. 9, 10.

mine its laws with candour, and see which of them he can reduce: Would he love God with *less* than *all* his heart; or his neighbour *less* than himself? Were he to reduce any one law below its present standard, he would so far give a licence for rebellion throughout all the kingdoms of the earth, and reason for murmuring throughout all the regions of hell, since a lower standard was appointed for others than was ever allowed to them.

But this righteousness is no less visible in the administration of the king, than in the laws by which he governs: for in no one instance is his favour or his frown accorded to any one, but in a strict consistency with equity. On whom did the king ever frown but on account of his transgressions, or more than in proportion to their enormity? or on whom did he ever deign to smile, but on those who humbled themselves before him as guilty, and pleaded his perfect righteousness as the ground of all their hopes? Nay, where did he ever pardon one rebel, till that rebel had cast himself entirely on the merit of his sacrifice, whereby Divine justice had been satisfied, and the law of God magnified? In earth, in hell, in heaven, the righteousness of his sceptre is alike displayed, and to all eternity shall it be acknowledged throughout the whole extent of his dominions.]

Keeping in view the general scope of the passage as well as our own individual benefit, we would observe by way of IMPROVEMENT,

1. How clearly are the great truths of the Gospel founded on the Old Testament!

[We find nothing in the New Testament which was not predicted in the Old. Hence our blessed Lord and his Apostles continually refer to the Jewish Scriptures in confirmation of their own word. And it is worthy of particular remark, that we never so much as once hear of their enemies controverting or objecting to the construction which they put upon the Scriptures. The true import of the prophecies was, in many respects, better understood then than now; because the Jews, in order to justify their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, have laboured to find out other interpretations of the Scriptures, different from those which their own forefathers acknowledged and approved. And I cannot but regard the very circumstance of the Apostles citing the different prophecies in the way they did, as a strong presumption, that the Scriptures were understood at that time in the very sense in which they cited them: for, had they not been so understood by the Jews of that day, the citation of them would have been nugatory: yea, worse than nugatory; it would have been absurd in the highest degree; and would have produced the directly opposite effect to that which it was intended to produce. Let any one, with this impression upon his mind, read the chapter

ter from whence our text is taken, and he cannot for one moment doubt the Divinity of Christ, or the truth of his Messiahship.]

2. How safely may we commit ourselves into the Saviour's hands!

[Were our King a man only, what confidence could we have in his protection? He could not be every where: he could not hear and aid all persons at the same moment: consequently we might be overwhelmed before he could come to our aid. But our King is "the Mighty God," who has all things in heaven, and earth, and hell under his controul; and who has engaged that all his enemies, and ours, shall be put under his feet. Let none then be discouraged because of the number, power, or inveteracy of their enemies: for, if he be for us, none can successfully be against us. Let the consideration therefore which quieted David's mind in all his troubles, compose and quiet our minds also under every trial that can befal us: "the floods have lifted, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice: the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea[p]:" "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven[q]."]

3. How obedient should we be to his holy will!

[Were it only that we are the work of his hands, we ought to be altogether obedient to his will: but how much more, when, in addition to being our Creator, he has become our Redeemer; and has assumed our nature, in order that we, through his vicarious sufferings, may be made partakers of his kingdom and glory! We must not forget that the throne on which he sits is a Mediatorial throne; and the kingdom which he governs is a Mediatorial kingdom: and that he exercises his dominion not merely *over* us, but *for* us. How happy would the fallen angels be, if they could have one more offer of being received into his kingdom! But this privilege belongs to us only; and to us no longer than during the present short period of our existence upon earth. If we cast not down the weapons of our rebellion now, the day of grace will be past, and we shall hear him say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me." But methinks we should be constrained by love, rather than by fear. Think, my Brethren, what it has cost him to establish his kingdom: what conflicts he has endured for us, that we might be made partakers of his triumphs! It was "through his own death that he triumphed over him that had the power of death, and delivered us from his cruel bondage." Give ye then up yourselves to him: and though death should await you for your fidelity to him, fear it not, but rejoice that ye are counted worthy to suffer it for his sake. And know assuredly, that,

[p] Ps. xciii. 3, 4. [q] Ps. xi. 3, 4.

that, "if ye suffer with him, ye shall reign with him," and to all eternity "be glorified together" with him.].

MXCVII.

THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS.

Heb. i. 14. *Are they not all Ministering Spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of Salvation?*

THE superiority of Christ to angels occupies the mind of the Apostle throughout this chapter. He has illustrated it already in a very convincing way. He has adduced many passages of Holy Writ which confessedly belong to the Messiah; and has shewn, that they never have been, nor can be, applied to them, because the things predicated in them, exclusively belong to him. The representations given of the angels necessarily imply a great inferiority to him: for they are commanded to worship him[a], as their Creator[b], and their God[c]. Nor is it him only whom they serve: they are the servants of his people also, appointed by him to that very office, and executing it for his honour and glory. This the Apostle mentions as an indisputable fact; and appeals to the Hebrews themselves respecting it: "Are they not all Ministering Spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of Salvation?"

The Ministry of angels is not only a curious subject as it relates to them, but a very interesting subject as it relates to us; since we, if we be heirs of salvation, are the very persons for whom they minister. We propose therefore to consider the Ministry of angels,

I. As evinced in their services for God's people of old—

They are called by the Apostle "Ministering Spirits," which designates at once both their nature and office. In their nature they are not corporeal, but spiritual beings: and they possess both wisdom and strength

[a] ver. 6. [b] ver. 10—12. [c] ver. 8.

strength far beyond any of the sons of men [d]. Their number was once far greater than it at present is; for vast multitudes of them "kept not their first estate, but left their first habitation, and are reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day [e]." Those who have held fast their integrity are called "the elect angels;" and of them there are myriads, yea millions without number [f]. Amongst them are different ranks and orders, (as there are also amongst the fallen angels,) under Michael their head, who is therefore called "the Arch-angel," whilst they are called "*his* angels [g]."

On God they wait, as his servants, with the utmost alacrity and zeal [h]: and by him they are employed in executing his holy will.

They were employed by him at the promulgation of his law [i]: and they have been rendered useful also in the diffusion of his Gospel [k].

By him they have been sent forth both as executioners of his vengeance and as dispensers of his mercies. By an angel, he slew in one hour the whole Egyptian first-born both of men and beasts [l]. By the agency of one of those powerful spirits was the pestilence produced, to which, for the punishment of David's sin, 70,000 Israelites fell victims [m]. It was by a sword wielded by a similar messenger from God, that 185,000 of the Assyrian host also were slain in one night [n]. Nor is it in such extensive ravages only that they have been employed: a single individual, whom God has ordained to punish for his iniquity, has been the object of a similar commission, and been made to feel the weight of an angel's avenging arm: an angel smote Herod for his pride, and he was eaten up with worms [o]. In like manner they have been frequently made God's ministers for good. In the instances already mentioned they proved

[d] 2 Sam. xiv. 20. 2 Pet. ii. 11.
[e] Jude, ver. 6. [f] Ps. lxviii. 17. Rev. v. 11. Heb. xii. 22.
[g] Jude, ver. 9. Rev. xii. 7. [h] Ps. ciii. 20, 21.
[i] Acts vii. 53. Deut xxxiii. 2. [k] Rev. xiv. 6.
[l] Exod. xii. 23. [m] 2 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17.
[n] Isai. xxxvii. 36. [o] Acts xii. 23.

proved signal benefactors, no less than avengers: for, if they smote the enemies of God, they effected thereby a great deliverance for Israel: and if they corrected his people, it was with a view to humble them, and to bring them to repentance. But they have been no less willing to minister to individuals than to a whole nation: nor have they accounted any office beneath their attention. Was Abraham's steward sent to seek a wife for Isaac? an angel went before him to prepare his way [p]. Did Hagar flee from the face of her mistress? an angel advised her to return [q]. And when she was put away by Abraham, and her child was perishing with thirst, an angel directed her to a well, where she might find an immediate supply [r]. Were Lot and his family in danger of perishing in Sodom? with what affectionate solicitude did angels go to bring them forth from that devoted place [s]! Does Balaam hasten to curse Israel? an angel obstructs his way, and does not suffer him to proceed, till he engages to utter nothing but what the Lord shall put into his mouth [t]. Does the highly favoured Daniel pour out his soul before God in prayer? an angel flies from the highest heavens to give him assured intelligence of the acceptance of his prayers [u].

Under the New Testament dispensation also, we find them alike attentive to the welfare of God's people. Is the child Jesus in danger of being involved in the common ruin of the infants whom Herod slew? an angel appears to Joseph, and directs him to flee to Egypt with his wife and child [x]. Is Peter kept in prison to be brought forth the very next day for execution? an angel opens for him the prison doors, and liberates him from his confinement [y]. Is Paul ready to be overwhelmed in the waves of the tempestuous ocean? an angel comes to assure him, that both he, and for his sake all the ship's company also, shall be saved [z].

We

[p] Gen. xxiv. 7. [q] Gen. xvi. 7—9. [r] Gen. xxi. 17.
[s] Gen. xix. 1, 11, 15, 16, 17. [t] Numb. xxii. 22—35.
[u] Dan. ix. 21—23. [x] Matt. ii. 13. [y] Acts xii. 7.
[z] Acts xxvii. 23.

We might adduce a great many other instances of their friendly interposition for the people of God: but sufficient has been spoken to shew, that the office of ministering to the saints has not been assigned to them on one or two occasions only of extraordinary magnitude, but that it has been in every successive age their uniform and willing employment.

By the view we have taken of their Ministry in former times, we shall be prepared to contemplate it,

II. As still exercised towards the heirs of salvation—

The vision of Jacob's ladder, with the angels ascending and descending upon it, is still realized throughout the world, even as our blessed Lord has taught us to expect it should be[a]. As soon as we embrace the Gospel, we are brought into actual communion with them, even with that "innumerable company of them" that are before the throne of God[b]. But, as ubiquity is the prerogative of God only, there are some who have a special charge of particular saints, and whose office it is to watch over them in a more especial manner[c].

They have still, as formerly, a great concern for the Gospel, desiring to get a deeper insight into it themselves[d], and longing for a diffusion of it throughout the world. As the first promulgation of it was to them an occasion of joy and triumph, insomuch that they left their bright abodes in heaven, and came down, a whole multitude of them, to earth on purpose to proclaim it[e]; so the acceptance of it by any single individual is to them a source of unutterable joy: not even the glory of the Divine presence so attracts their notice, but they can with pleasure turn away their eyes to behold a mourning penitent; nor is their felicity in God himself so perfect, but it receives an addition from this blissful sight[f]. From the moment that any one receives the Gospel aright, they become his servants, and wait upon him with unwearied

[a] Gen. xxviii. 12. John i. 51.
[b] Heb. xii. 22.
[c] Matt. xviii. 10. & Acts xii. 15.
[d] 1 Pet. i. 12.
[e] Luke ii. 13, 14.
[f] Luke xv. 10.

ried assiduity. "They encamp around him" when he is stationary[g]; and go out with him wheresoever he goes, in order to "hold him up in their hands, lest he dash his foot against a stone[h]." Nor is it about his corporeal welfare only that they are concerned: they are attentive also to the concerns of his soul, and oftentimes succour him in his conflicts, even as they did his Lord and Master, who, we are expressly told, had "an angel sent from heaven to strengthen him" when agonizing in the garden[i]. What was then accomplished in the Head, is doubtless yet daily wrought in the members also: for as "He was tempted in all things like as we are," so shall we be succoured in all things like as he was[k]. In a dying hour, more especially, they redouble their attentions; and wait with tender solicitude the departure of the spirit, that they may bear it on their wings to heaven into the very presence of their God. Nor do they render this service only to men of higher rank and quality: they minister with equal pleasure to the least and meanest of mankind: if there be a Lazarus so poor as to subsist only on the crumbs that fall from a rich man's table, and so destitute of friends that the very dogs surround him to lick his sores[l], they will perform the same office for him as freely as for the greatest monarch upon earth.

Beyond this life too will they afford us their kind services: for, when our bodies, after having mouldered into dust, shall again be raised in the last day, these benevolent agents will employ themselves in gathering together the dispersed saints from every quarter of the globe, and in bearing them into the presence of their Lord and Saviour[m]. The separation of the tares from the wheat will be effected by them: and, whilst the tares are bound up by them in bundles, and cast into the fire that never shall be quenched, the wheat shall be gathered by them, and carried into the granary of heaven[n]. O fearful thought to

[g] Ps. xxxiv. 7. [h] Ps. xci. 11, 12. [i] Luke xxii. 43.
[k] John vi. 57. [l] Luke xvi. 21, 22. [m] Matt. xxiv. 30, 31.
[n] Matt. xiii. 30.

to the ungodly, to find those benevolent spirits the instruments of their destruction, when they might, but for their own fault, have secured them as agents for their welfare! But to the saints how joyful the contemplation, that those elder Brethren who never fell, will so exult in, and contribute to, the recovery of our apostate race!

Their services will now be ended, because we shall then no longer have any occasion for their aid. But the expressions of their love will never end: for, having seen with joy our fruition of Redeeming Love, they will unite with us in songs of praise to our redeeming God for ever and ever[o].

IMPROVEMENT—

1. How desirable is it to be found amongst "the heirs of salvation!"

[To be heirs of great estates we all account desirable; but to be "heirs of salvation," how few of us regard as an object worthy of any serious attention! The very character of an heir of salvation, so far from being estimable in the eyes of the generality, is despised; and the names by which such a person is designated in Scripture, are made terms of reproach. "The elect," "the saints," "the godly," are names in the estimation of the world equivalent to hypocrites and fanatics. Such, however, is not the opinion of the holy angels. When once we are brought into that family of which Christ is the Head, they love us, they honour us, they serve us; yea, they account it their highest honour to minister unto us. Let me then exhort all of you, my Brethren, to defer to the judgment of those, who must confessedly be so much better judges than yourselves: for it is not the angels only who thus express their sentiments, but God also, who assigns to them this very office, and sends them forth for the execution of it. And, if men treat us with contempt because we prefer an invisible and eternal inheritance before one that is visible and temporal, "let us not be ashamed, but let us glorify God on this behalf[p]."

Does any one ask, How shall I become an heir of salvation? I answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart:" for then shall ye be children of the living God[q]: and, "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ[r];" who, if he is "the Saviour of all men, is especially the Saviour of them that believe[s]."]

2. How

[o] Rev. v. 9—13. [p] 1 Pet. iv. 16. [q] John i. 12. Gal. iv. 26, 29.
[r] Rom. viii. 17. [s] 1 Tim. iv. 10.

2. How awful will it be to be found amongst the opposers of God's people!

[Little did the persecuting Saul think whom he opposed, when he laboured to destroy the followers of Christ. He imagined that his efforts were directed only against a number of wild enthusiasts: but, when he heard the Lord Jesus Christ himself expostulating with him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME?" he saw his error, and learned, that "whoso toucheth God's people, toucheth the apple of his eye[t]:" nor are the angels indifferent about the treatment which is shewn to the objects of their care. Of this we are assured expressly by our Lord himself: and we desire your particular attention to this point.

Our Lord, in order to inculcate the great doctrine of humility, exhorted his disciples to imitate a little child, which, for the more effectually impressing of the lesson upon their minds, he had set in the midst of them. He then declared, that whoso should offend one of the little ones who believed in him, it would be better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. And the reason which he assigns is very remarkable: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, that in heaven *their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven*[u]." What is the meaning of this? and what is the force of this menace? The foregoing subject will explain it. The meaning is this. The least and meanest of God's people have one or more angels peculiarly interested about them in heaven: and, when they see the injuries done to the objects of their care, they cry to God in their behalf for vengeance; "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge their cause[x]?" And then, as "they do continually his commandments, *hearkening unto the voice of his word*," they wait for the first intimation of the Divine will, and are ready to execute without delay the judgment which God assigns: and, if there were 185,000 of those enemies, they should all be "eaten up with worms," as Herod was, or be cut off, like the Assyrian host, in one single night. And let us mark particularly the extent of this admonition. It is not said, Take heed that ye do not *destroy* my people; but, that ye do not "*despise*" them; that ye despise not "*one*" of them; not one of "*these little ones*," however mean and despicable he may appear; for he has an avenger in heaven: and the vengeance he will inflict is far more terrible than being drowned in the depths of the sea; for into the depths of hell shall he cast your *soul*, the very instant he has inflicted the fatal stroke upon your body. Ah! Brethren, will ye not tremble at this menace? Will ye still account it a light matter either outwardly to deride, or *inwardly to despise*, a child of God? Beware, I pray you, of your impending

[t] Zech. ii. 8. [u] Matt. xviii. 6, 10. [x] Rev. vi. 10.

impending danger: and, if ye will not seek to become heirs of salvation yourselves, at your peril, lift not up your finger against one that is. If this be *man*'s threatening, disregard it; but, if it be *God*'s, know that ye cannot hope for success in fighting against God.]

3. How excellent a work is that of ministering to the saints!

[It has been shewn that this is an office which even the angels themselves affect. And that they do perform it, is *not merely asserted* in our text, but *assumed* as a fact that is undoubted and unquestionable: "*Are they not* Ministering Spirits? are they not *all* sent forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation?" Is there so much as one amongst them all that accounts himself *too high* to wait upon *the least and lowest* of the human race? If then such be *their* employment, see what an honourable office those amongst ourselves sustain who are labouring *in any way* for the good of souls! They are fellow-workers with angels, yea, and fellow-workers with God also. Engage then in this good work, all of you, according to your ability; knowing that, "if ye are to do good unto all men, ye are especially to do it unto them that are of the household of faith[y]." Do it then in every possible way[z]——— And the more ye resemble the angels here, the more richly shall ye participate their felicity in a better world.]

[y] Gal. vi. 10.

[z] Here recommend *the Bible Society*, or *Mission Societies*, or *Jews' Society*, or *Charity Schools*, or *Visiting Societies*, or *Charities of any kind*, as occasion may require.

MXCVIII.

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO ANGELS.

Heb. ii. 6—8. *One in a certain place testified, saying, What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the Son of man that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels: thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the work of thy hands: thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.*

OUR blessed Lord has said, "Search the Scriptures; for they are they which testify of me." Hence it appears, that the Jews were highly privileged; because, if they would only look up to God for the illumination of their minds, they had within their reach an infallible directory in their way to heaven. But we

we are still more highly privileged, in that we have a multitude of passages pointed out to us by men, who were themselves inspired of God to discern and to explain the meaning of them. If we had been left to ourselves, we might have doubted whether our interpretations of the Scripture were just: but, when holy men of God are moved by the Holy Ghost, to open and apply those very words to Christ, which the Prophets, under the influence of the same Spirit, spake of him, we proceed without any fear of error or delusion.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the types and prophecies of the Old Testament are more fully opened to us, than in any other part of the Apostolic writings. That Epistle was evidently written on purpose to point out the connexion between the Jewish and Christian dispensations; to shew their perfect correspondence with each other, and the completion of Judaism in Christianity. It would be profitable to trace this through the whole Epistle: but we must content ourselves with noticing only the passage before us.

Let us then consider,

I. The testimony here adduced—

The manner in which the Apostle speaks of this passage of Holy Writ is somewhat remarkable: at first it appears as if he himself did not recollect the author, or the part of Scripture where the passage occurred; but the fact is, that the Jews were so conversant with their Scriptures, as not to need any thing more than the mere citation of the words: the writer of them, and the place, were sufficiently known to all. What its import is, we can be at no loss to determine.

[David, contemplating the starry heavens, and the perfections of God as displayed in them, breaks out into a devout acknowledgment of the condescension of God, in noticing so poor and abject a creature as man; and his goodness in having subjected to man the whole animal creation[a]. *This is the primary meaning* of the text: and, if we had not been instructed by God himself to look for any thing further, we should have rested in that as

[a] Ps. viii. 3—8,

as its full and only import. But we know on infallible authority, that there was *a prophetic meaning* in the psalm; and that it referred to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Having this clue given us, we find, that the mystical sense of the passage is, if we may so speak, by far the most literal. The words, in fact, are inexplicable, as referred to *man*, whether in his innocent or fallen state: for Adam was not reduced from a higher state in order to be made lower than the angels[b]: nor is man, in his fallen state, "*a little* lower than they, but a *great deal* lower. Moreover, fallen man was not crowned with glory and honour;" nor are all the creatures in a state of subjection to him. The very words themselves therefore lead our thoughts to Christ, in whom alone they ever received their accomplishment: and the manner in which the Apostle quotes them, shews that the Jews themselves had interpreted them in that very sense in which he quoted them: for he is arguing with the Jews, to shew them the superiority of Christ to Moses, their great Lawgiver, and to the Angels, by whose Ministration their law was given: and, if he had quoted passages from their writings which did not bear directly on his point, or had put a construction upon them which had not been generally received, they would have denied his interpretation of the passages he adduced: and consequently his whole argument would have immediately fallen to the ground.

If any thing further were wanted to shew that the testimony is here properly adduced, we might observe, that our blessed Lord himself quotes the very words before the text as applicable to himself, and *as being generally understood to refer to the Messiah*[c].]

Having ascertained the meaning of the testimony, let us consider,

II. The points established by it—

Some interpreters understand the text as quoted only in an *accommodated* sense: but the words themselves, and the scope of the Apostle's argument, prove that we must understand it as a prophecy that has been strictly and literally fulfilled. In this view it contains much respecting the Lord Jesus: It proves,

1. The dignity of his person—

[The scope of the Apostle's argument in the two first chapters of this Epistle is, to shew that Christ is superior to the heavenly hosts, and "hath by inheritance a more excellent name than they." *Him* the Father acknowledges as his only-begotten Son[d]: and commands all the angels to adore him[e]. *Him* he addresses

[b] ἠλάττωσας conveys this idea.
[c] Ps. ii. 2. with Matt. xxi. 15, 16.
[d] Heb. i. 5.
[e] ib. ver. 6.

addresses as the Creator and Governor of all things, the eternal, immutable Jehovah[f], to whom all adverse powers shall assuredly be subjected[g]: to whom also the Christian dispensation ("of which St. Paul speaks," and which he designated as the "world to come,") is altogether committed, that he may order every thing relating to it according to his sovereign will and pleasure[h]. As for angels, he has never spoken such things concerning *them*, or committed such power to *them*[i]. *They* are the fellow-servants of the saints[k], united with them as part of the Church over which Christ presides[l], and appointed to minister unto them in the capacity of servants[m]. However venerable therefore they are in themselves, and whatever honour God put upon them in the giving of the law, they are infinitely below the Lord Jesus, who is their Creator, their Governor, and their God. In his human nature he was "made a little lower than they;" but in his pre-existent nature he was infinitely above them. O that we may have worthy conceptions of his Divine Majesty, and ever be ready to address him in the words of Thomas, "My Lord, and my God!"]

2. The truth of his Messiahship—

[Here is a prophecy that must receive an accomplishment: there must be a person superior to the angels in his own nature, and made lower than them by the assumption of our nature. He must submit to this humiliation "for the purpose of suffering death," as the penalty due to the sins of men. Having "tasted death for every man," he must be raised, and "crowned with glory and honour," and must "have all things in heaven, earth, and hell, put under his feet." Now then we ask, In whom has this, or any part of it, been fulfilled? Who has experienced either the humiliation or the exaltation which are here predicted? That Jesus has fulfilled the prophecy, we know: for, "being in the form of God, and accounting it no robbery to be equal with God, he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant: and having submitted to death, even the death of the cross, he has been exalted, and has had a name given him above every name, that every knee should bow to him, and every tongue confess him to be the Lord, to the glory of God the Father[n]." Is there any one else of whom these things, or any one of them, can be spoken? Assuredly not: "*But we see Jesus*" thus humbled, and thus exalted[o]: and, consequently, Jesus is, beyond all doubt, "the Christ, the Saviour of the world."]

3. The certainty of his triumphs—

[When

[f] Heb. ver. 8—12. [g] ib. ver. 13. [h] Heb. ii. 5.
[i] Heb. ii. 5. [k] Rev. xix. 10. & xxii. 9.
[l] Eph. i. 10. [m] Heb. i. 14.
[n] Phil. ii. 6—11. where ἐκένωσε in ver. 7. corresponds with ἠλάττωσας in the text.
[o] ver. 9.

[When he was on earth "he was crucified through weakness; but now he liveth by the power of God." He is not only "crowned with glory and honour," as his followers will be, but is "set far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and being constituted Head over all things to the Church, he filleth all in all," supplying every member of it with light and life, even as the sun does in the material world[p]. The Apostle indeed justly observes, "We see not yet all things put under him[q]." But we see enough to assure us, that all things shall in due time be put under him. See to what a state he himself was reduced, when he lay sealed up, and guarded in the silent tomb! but he rose triumphant, and ascended up to heaven, and "sits as King upon God's holy hill of Zion." See how quickly he triumphed over all the lusts and prejudices of mankind, and subdued millions to the obedience of faith; and *this* through the instrumentality of a few poor fishermen! See how he carries on his victories yet daily through the world! Indeed every saint is a living witness for him, and a pledge to the world that nothing in the universe shall finally withstand his power.]

Surely this subject is full,

1. Of consolation to the godly—

[You are weak; and your enemies are mighty: but is this any ground for despondency. If an angel had been set at the head of the Church, you might well be afraid[r]; but under the care of Jesus you have nothing to fear. Think with yourselves, Is not the Lord Jesus possessed of "all power, both in heaven and earth?" Is there not "a fulness treasured up in him," on purpose that "you may receive out of it, even grace for grace?" Does not "all the fulness of the Godhead dwell in him bodily;" and has he not said, "My grace is sufficient for you?" Fear not, then; but "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Adopt the triumphant language which the Prophet has put into your mouth; and "say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Fear not, I say; for "through His strength you shall be enabled to do all things," and "be more than conqueror through Him that loved you."]

2. Of terror to the ungodly—

[Because you behold not many signal interpositions of his power, you think that you may rebel against him with impunity. But see whether this prophecy has not been so far fulfilled already, as to give you reason to expect its full accomplishment! God has even "sworn that every knee shall bow to Jesus:"

[p] Eph. i. 20—23. [q] ver. 8.
[r] See Exod. xxxii. 34. & xxxiii. 2, 3.

Jesus[s]:" and, if you will not submit to the sceptre of his grace, he will "break you in pieces with a rod of iron[t]." Nor is it a mere nominal submission that will suffice: You must put yourselves willingly and unreservedly "*under his feet*," as conscious of your ill desert, and as ready to justify him, if he should "execute upon you the fierceness of his anger." You must be wholly and altogether his, in every member of your body, and in every faculty of your soul. O deceive not yourselves by a feigned or partial submission! ——— but "kiss the Son:" kiss him in token of the ardour of your affection, and of the delight you take in living to his glory. This is your true "wisdom, even though you be kings and judges of the earth[u]." He is that "stone which the builders refused, and which is become the head of the corner:" if you build upon him, you will find him "a sure foundation;" but if you reject him, "he will fall upon you, and crush you to powder[x]."]

[s] Isai. xlv. 23. with Rom. xiv. 11. [t] Ps. ii. 9.
[u] Ps. ii. 10—12. [x] Luke xx. 17, 18.

MXCIX.

THE ENDS OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION.

Heb. ii. 14, 15. *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them, who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage.*

IS it so indeed, that He who was the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; that He who created and upholdeth all things by the word of his power; that He whom all the angels in heaven adore; became a man, and was made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted? Yes, "He, who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, emptied himself of all his glory, and took upon him the form of a servant:" "the mighty God himself was a child born, and a Son given." And shall God be manifest in the flesh, and we not inquire into the reasons of such a stupendous mystery? Shall we profess to believe this truth; and yet pay no more attention to it, than if it was a cunningly-devised fable? Let us inquire,

what

what occasion there was for it, and what ends God designed to accomplish by it. These are stated in the words before us. The children, whom he designed to redeem from death and hell, were in such a state, that nothing short of this would avail for their final happiness: they were subjected to death, and could be delivered from it only by one dying in their stead: they were in bondage to Satan, and could only be rescued from his dominion by one who should overcome this great adversary, in their nature, and in their behalf; in a word, by one who should both suffer what they merited, and gain the victories which they needed.

These are the ends of our Saviour's incarnation, as specified in the text.

I. The *more immediate* end was to suffer—

Suffer he must, even unto death, if he would effect the deliverance of his chosen people.

1. The necessities of his own people required it—

[They were reduced by sin to the lowest ebb of misery. Doomed to participate the lot of the fallen angels, they were as incapable as they of effecting their own deliverance. What then must be done? Must they be left to perish for ever? or shall an atonement be made for them? But who can offer an atonement that shall be of sufficient value to expiate their offences? The blood of bulls and of goats will not suffice: nor if the highest angel in heaven could offer himself, would that be adequate to the occasion; seeing that his merits, whatever they might be, could never extend to all the millions of our guilty race: the sacrifice, to answer that end, must be of infinite value: it must be offered by a person of infinite dignity: He must be God as well as man. He must be man, that he may suffer; He must be God, that his sufferings may be available for the desired end. Hence the necessity for our blessed Lord to become incarnate; and hence the necessity for him to die. Supposing him to come from heaven, and to teach us both by precept and example, that would not answer the necessities of man: Divine justice must be satisfied for the sins of men; the holiness of the Deity must be displayed in the punishment of sin: the truth of God, which denounced a curse against every transgression of his law, must be kept inviolate: in a word, a sentence of death was gone forth against sinners; and it must be inflicted on them, or on a surety in their stead. Hence, if Jesus would ever bring us back to God, "he must

must suffer, the just, in the place of us the unjust[a]." If he would redeem our souls, he must "give his own life a ransom for us."]

2. His own covenant engagements required it—

[From all eternity did the Son of God engage to repair the evils which it was foreseen would in time be introduced by sin. A council of peace was held between the Father and the Son[b]: the terms which were then agreed upon, are expressly mentioned by the prophet Isaiah; "When thou shalt make thy soul an offering for sin, thou shalt see a seed, who shall prolong their days; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in thy hand[c]." These terms being acceded to on the Son's part, "a body was prepared him[d]," and "he came in due season, made of a woman, and under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law[e]." His incarnation alone would not have fulfilled his engagements: he must suffer: and hence, when his sufferings came upon him to the uttermost, and he felt, *as a man*, disposed to deprecate them, he especially called to his remembrance the engagements he had entered into, and submitted to drink the cup which was put into his hands: "Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name[f]!"]

3. All the predictions concerning him required it—

[The very first promise clearly pointed it out: he, as "the seed of the woman, was to bruise the serpent's head:" but in the conflict "his own heel was to be bruised[g]." To what an extent he was to suffer is fully declared: "his visage was to be so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: and so was he to sprinkle many nations[h]." Standing in the place of us who deserved utter excision, he must suffer it[i]. All the sacrifices of the Mosaic law shadowed forth this awful event. He was to be a Priest; but what sacrifice could he offer? He was not of the tribe to which alone the offering of animal sacrifices belonged. He had no offering but his own body: which therefore he did present; and "with his own blood he entered within the veil, there to carry on and perfect the work he had begun on earth[k]." Looking forward to his death, he often referred to it as that which should speedily be accomplished, *as the appointed means of saving a ruined world*[l]. And, when his disciples were stumbled at his death, and regarded it as an event by which all their hopes and expectations were frustrated, he reproved them for their ignorance and unbelief, and shewed them, that

[a] 1 Pet. iii. 18. [b] Zech. vi. 13. [c] Isai. liii. 10.
[d] Heb. x. 5. [e] Gal. iv. 4, 5. [f] John xii. 27, 28.
[g] Gen. iii. 15. [h] Isai. lii. 13—15. See also liii. 4—12.
[i] Dan. ix. 26. [k] Heb. viii. 3, 4. & ix. 11, 12.
[l] 1 John xii. 31—33.

that it had been the great subject of prophecy from the beginning of the world; and that it was *necessary* to the accomplishment of the work he had undertaken[m]———]

Such was the more immediate end of Christ's incarnation!

II. The *ultimate* end of it was to reign and triumph—

In overlooking the previous humiliation of their Messiah, the Jews greatly err: but in their expectation of a triumphing Messiah, they are right. He was indeed "to drink of the brook in the way;" but he was then "to lift up his head." His sufferings were to precede: but the whole Scripture attests, that a glory was to follow[n]: and by the very sufferings which he sustained, his triumphs were secured to him. He was to triumph,

1. In the destruction of Satan's empire—

[Satan, that "murderer," had introduced sin and death into the world: and by his continual agency he is carrying forward the work of death amongst the sinners of mankind; and exulting in the multitudes which are daily subjected to his tyrannic sway. But Jesus, we are assured, came to weaken and destroy his empire: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil[o]."

But the point particularly to be noticed is, that Jesus was to accomplish this victory by means of his own death: "By death he was to destroy him that had the power of death." By reason of sin, all the human race were subjected to everlasting chains of darkness in the regions of despair. But Jesus, nailing to the cross the hand-writing that was against us, has cancelled it for ever. Satan thought, that, when he had so far prevailed as to secure the death of the Lord Jesus, he had gained his cause: but it was that very event which gave the death-blow to all Satan's power, in that it removed the only ground on which Satan could maintain his stand against the Children of men. It was by that event that Jesus satisfied the demands of law and justice, and discharged the debt which had been contracted by mankind. And, that once discharged by our Surety, we can claim our release from all obligation to pay it ourselves. Hence we are told, that Jesus, whilst upon the cross, "spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly in it[p]." Yes, if Jesus had, as some have feigned, gone down himself to hell, and opened the prison-doors to those who were already there, he would not have more signally

[m] Luke xxiv. 21, 25, 26, 27, 44—46.
[n] 1 Pet. i. 11.
[o] 1 John iii. 8.
[p] Col. ii. 14, 15.

signally displayed his power, than he did in his death and resurrection, whereby he vanquished Satan and "led captivity itself captive."]

2. In the deliverance of his own people—

[Death being inflicted as the penalty of sin, and being a prelude to an unknown state, all men by nature dread it. Though many, through pride and thoughtlessness, may brave it on a field of battle, no man can behold its gradual approaches without an awful apprehension of its terrors. But the Lord Jesus would not suffer that his people should remain in such bondage; and by his death he has effectually freed them from it. The sting of death is sin: but he by his death has cancelled sin, and blotted it out as a morning cloud. The offering which has satisfied the justice of the Deity, satisfies the sinner's conscience, and brings perfect peace into the soul. And it was one end of our Lord's death to effect this; that his people might be brought into perfect liberty, and enjoy a very heaven upon earth. To them death is now become a friend, for whose arrival to look forward with eager desire[q]: it is numbered amongst their treasures also[r]; and all fear, either of its present terrors, or future consequences, is removed. "The Son has made them free; and they are free indeed."]

ADDRESS,

1. The captive sinner—

[How lamentable is it that the effects of Jesus' death should be so limited, as we see they really are! Though Satan is a vanquished enemy, there are but few who will "put their foot upon his neck." Many are his willing captives still: and love the chains wherewith he binds them[s]. Oh, Beloved, what an awful thought is it, that to multitudes the incarnation and death of Christ are a curse, rather than a blessing! "Had he never come to die for them, they had not (comparatively) had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin:" and the state of Sodom and Gomorrha is less terrible than theirs. When will ye lay this to heart, O ye who "walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, who worketh in all the children of disobedience?" Do but reflect on the account which you must hereafter give, and on the self-condemnation which you will feel in the day of judgment, when the full effects of your present disobedience will come upon you. I cannot contemplate your condition now, or your feelings in that day, without saying with the Prophet, "Oh! that my head were waters, and mine eyes were a fountain of tears, that they might run down day and night in your behalf!" Oh let not all the wonders of Redeeming Love be in vain to you, yea, worse than in vain,—a melancholy source of tenfold condemnation!]

2. The

[q] 2 Pet. iii. 12. [r] 1 Cor. iii. 22. [s] 2 Tim. ii. 26.

2. The awakened penitent—

[Are you beginning to feel your sins a heavy burthen? Bless and adore your God for the provision he has made for you in the Son of his love. Your guilt is expiated by your Saviour's blood: and Satan, who has kept you hitherto in such cruel bondage, is dethroned. Look unto this Saviour. Did he come down from heaven? It was to seek and save the lost, yea, and the very chief of sinners. Lay hold on him; plead with God the sacrifice which he has offered; and seek an interest in the victories he has gained. It is for that he has lived; for you he has died; for you he reigns: and never is he better satisfied with the travail of his soul, than when he sees such as you born to God through him[t]———]

3. The trembling Believer—

[What would you that God should add to all that he has done for you? What is there wanting to dispel your fears, and encourage your hearts? Are you afraid of Satan? He is a vanquished enemy. Are you afraid of death? To you it is only as the gate of heaven. Be of good cheer. If you are weak, "your Redeemer is mighty;" and his "strength shall be perfected in your weakness." He, who for your sakes "partook of flesh and blood," with all the sinless infirmities of your nature, knows by experience all that you feel, and will afford you all needful succour. Fear not; "He will not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory." Rejoice then in him; rejoice evermore: and doubt not but that "he who has begun a good work in you, will, for his own sake, perfect it to the end."]

[t] Isai. liii. 11.

MC.

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO MOSES.

Heb. iii. 5, 6. *Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ, as a Son over his own house: whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.*

IN order to have a just conception of the Christian dispensation, we must above all things acquire Scriptural views of the person of Christ, as God and man, and of his Mediatorial character, as Emmanuel, God with us. It is in this latter view more especially, that we are led to contemplate him throughout

out this whole Epistle. As God, he is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" whilst, as man, "he has purged our sins, and is set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high[a]:" but it is as God and man in one Christ that his sacrifice becomes effectual for this great end. It is in his Mediatorial capacity, as God-man, that he is exalted above all the angels in heaven, who are expressly enjoined to "worship him[b]:" And it is in the same capacity that we are now called upon to "consider him as the Apostle and High Priest of our profession[c]." As "the Apostle" of our profession, *sent* like Moses, to instruct us in the mind and will of God, he is superior to Moses, whose instructions he is sent to supersede. And, in like manner, will his superiority to Aaron also be declared, when we shall come, in a subsequent part of this Epistle, to consider his Priesthood. It is the comparison between him and Moses which alone we have to notice at this time.

We proceed then to mark,

I. The superiority of Christ to Moses—

The character given of Moses is most exalted—

[He was "faithful in all God's house[d]." From the first moment of his undertaking the office that was assigned him, he was faithful in the discharge of it. Whatever was commanded him to do, he did; adding nothing, omitting nothing, neglecting nothing. Whether the commands were moral or ceremonial, he was observant of every the minutest direction that was given him. He was aware that all which he was commissioned to say or do, had respect to a future period, and was intended to shadow forth something under a future dispensation: and so accurate was he in every particular, that there is not the smallest want of agreement between the Jewish and Christian codes, the one answering to the other, as the coin to the die by which it is stamped. As the tabernacle, even to the smallest pin, was "made according to the pattern shewn to him in the Mount;" so was that whole dispensation in perfect accordance with that under which we live.

Much he had to try him, and to shake his fidelity: but he was immoveable. Nothing could for a moment divert him from his duty, or cause him to relax his efforts in his Master's cause.

And

[a] Ch. i. 3. [b] ib. ver. 4—6. [c] ver. 1. [d] Num. xii. 7.

And in this fidelity he stood alone. Aaron and Miriam both turned aside from the path of duty; yea, both confederated even against Moses himself. But Moses was stedfast to the end, unmoved, unwearied, unrestrained.]

But Christ in this respect was exalted infinitely above him—

[Christ also was faithful in all his house. He delivered nothing which he had not previously heard and learned of his Father: but all which had been given him either to do or teach, he did and taught with all imaginable fidelity: yea, and what he was ordained to suffer also for the sins of men, he patiently endured, drinking the bitter cup even to the dregs, and never stopping till he could say, in relation to it all, "'Tis finished."

Thus far the two may be supposed to have been upon an equality. But there are some points of difference between them, which exalt the office and character of Christ far above that of Moses. Moses was "a servant *in* the house of another:" Christ was a Son, or Lord, "*over* his own house." Moses only instructed his house: but Christ was the very source and builder of the house he governed; every member of it having been created by his power, and redeemed by his blood, and converted by his grace. The house itself would have had no existence but for him. Now, as the builder of an house, whether in a literal, political, or religious sense, must be far above the work which he has prepared; so must Christ, who formed his house, be far above every member of it: and as being the only true source of every thing in the Church, he must be truly and properly "God[e];" and consequently have infinitely higher glory than Moses, who was only a member of the very house which he himself was appointed to instruct and govern.]

That this superiority of his is not a mere speculative point, will appear, if we consider,

II. Our interest in it—

"We are his House"—

[The Church is called in Scripture "the House of God[f]:" and if we have truly believed in Christ, we are that house. We are those for whom all the wonders of Redeeming Love were planned; those for whom all that Christ has ever executed was undertaken; those for whose sake he has hitherto ordered all things both in heaven and earth; those over whom he still watches as his peculiar care; and those for whom he is engaged to complete the work he has begun. Wonderful thought! We are his House, his family, his peculiar people! What an honour! What a privilege! What a blessing!

But

[e] ver. 4. [f] 1 Tim. iii. 15.

But it is here taken for granted, that we have believed in him, and made him the One foundation of all our hopes, and boldly confessed him in the presence of an ungodly world:]

And under this character we have appropriate duties and obligations—

[We must "hold fast our confidence, and the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end." We shall have difficulties to encounter, even as Moses and Christ had: but we must endure like them, being "stedfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord." Whatever we may meet with, we must not for a moment be moved away from the hope of the Gospel: we must stand fast in our principles[g] ——— our practice[h] ——— our profession[i] ——— for on our stedfastness in these things our ultimate acceptance with him depends. "If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: but if we deny him, he will deny us. And if we believe not (either the one or other of these sayings), yet he abideth faithful (to his word); he cannot deny himself[k]:" He will be with us, whilst we are with him: if we seek him, he will be found of us: but if we forsake him, he will forsake us[l].]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let us put ourselves under his direction—

Christ is the great Head and Lord of all. From him we must receive directions, as he did from his Father, and as Moses did also. Nothing is to be done by us but according to his word; nothing to be done which he has forbidden; nothing to be omitted which he has commanded: no deviation is to be admitted in a way of excess or defect. If doubt at any time arise respecting the path of duty, we must consult him, and not proceed, till we have attained, as far as we can attain, the knowledge of his will. Human opinions are to have no weight with us in opposition to his word. And if we see not as yet the reasons of his commands, as Moses certainly did not in relation to the ceremonial law, we are not on that account to disobey them, but in all humility to comply with them, saying, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter[m]." Nor are we to complain of any commandment as difficult or self-denying; but to disregard even life itself, if by the sacrifice of it he may be glorified[n]. Admirable was the lesson which the Jews were taught in the Wilderness: if the pillar and the cloud moved for several days and nights together, they continued to follow it: and if it was stationary for a year together, they were stationary also. Thus it should be with us: we should move *when*, and

[g] Eph. iv. 14. [h] Heb. x. 26. [i] ib. ver. 23.
[k] 2 Tim. ii. 12. [l] 2 Chron. xv. 2. [m] John xiii. 6, 7.
[n] Phil. i. 20.

and *where*, and *as* the Lord prescribes, and in that way alone, to the latest hour of our lives.]

2. Let us endeavour to approve ourselves to him in our respective spheres—

[He walked amongst the seven golden candlesticks, the seven Churches of Asia, and declared to each of them, "I know thy works." And still are his eyes as a flame of fire to penetrate the inmost recesses of our hearts. We must not therefore be satisfied with walking irreproachable before men, but must labour to approve ourselves to him who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins. We must be attentive not to our actions only, but to our motives and principles, that, if possible, every thought may be brought into captivity to his will. We must seek to obtain from God that testimony which he bore to Moses, that we are "faithful in all our House." Let us look to it, that as parents and children, masters and servants, rulers and subjects, we do all that he has required of us. Let us labour to "serve him with a perfect heart;" so that in all our commerce with men, and in our secret walk with God, we may have "the witness of his Spirit that we please him[o];" and may receive from him in the last day that testimony of his approbation, "Well done, good and *faithful* servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."]

3. Let us expect from him all that he has undertaken for us—

[Still does he superintend the concerns of his Church: and though he has wrought much for us, yet is there much that yet remains to be done, and much that he has promised to be accomplished. But "his promises are sure to all his seed[p]:" not one of them shall ever fail: nor shall even the least member of his house ever have occasion to complain that he was disappointed of his hope. Joshua's testimony shall be that of all the Church in the last day, that "of all which God has promised, not one thing has failed[q]." Take hold then of his promises, and plead them before him. If they appear too great to be fulfilled, "stagger not at them, but hope against hope, and be strong in faith, giving glory to God[r]." If your tribulations be great, let them not for a moment obstruct your rejoicing in him; but "maintain your glorying firm unto the end." See the utmost desires of a bleeding soul all concentrated in one short prayer; and for the accomplishment of them rest, not merely on the love and power of Jesus, but on his fidelity: and when you have been praying that the very God of peace would sanctify you wholly, and that your whole spirit, and soul, and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord

[o] Heb. xi. 5.
[p] Rom. iv. 16.
[q] Josh. xxiii. 14.
[r] Rom. iv. 18, 20.

Lord Jesus Christ, then add, "Faithful is He that hath called me, who also will do it[a]."]

1 Thess. v. 23, 24.

MCI.

THE REASON WHY MEN ARE SO LITTLE PROFITED BY THE GOSPEL.

Heb. iv. 2. *Unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.*

IN these words there is a peculiarity of expression, which, till it is explained, seems almost unaccountable. Had the Apostle said that the Gospel was preached unto the Jews, as well as unto us, it would have been intelligible enough: but the text, as it stands, seems to give the preference to *them*, as if *they* had enjoyed a pre-eminent display of God's favour, and a clearer revelation of his will than ourselves. But the true meaning of the Apostle will appear from a due attention to the context. The Apostle is shewing the superiority of Christ to Moses, Moses being a servant only in God's House, but Christ being a Son and Lord over his own House. "That House are we," says he, "if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of our hope, firm unto the end[a]." To impress this idea the more strongly on our minds, he, in the language of David, urges us to guard against a departure from God, lest, like the Israelites of old, we provoke God to cut us off from his promised rest. But, regarding the very passage which he quotes as needing some explanation, since, though all the adults who came out of Egypt perished in the Wilderness, their children did enjoy the promised rest, he intimates, that the very expression of David shewed that Canaan was only a shadow of the rest promised to Israel, and that the true rest was common to all the children of Abraham, whether Jews or Gentiles. Of *this* rest he exhorts us not to come short: for that the promise *relating to it* belonged to

[a] Ch. iii. 7.

to *us* as much as to the Jews in the time of Moses: and, as *they* came short of it in consequence of their unbelief, so shall *we*, if we mix not faith with the truths we hear.

Now this view of the Apostle's words limits the term "Gospel" to that which alone is mentioned in the context, the promised *rest*. Hence, to compare the Gospel, as revealed to the Jews by Moses and the Prophets, with that which is revealed to us by Christ and his Apostles *in a general view*, would be beside the proper scope of our text. It would be profitable indeed to see how the moral law shuts us up to Christ, and how the ceremonial law shadows forth his work and offices; and how the Prophets also declare the fulness and excellency of his salvation; or, in the words of the Apostle, how "the righteousness which is by faith in Christ *is witnessed by the Law and the Prophets*[b]:" but we prefer confining our views to the precise idea that was in the Apostle's mind, because we then have more clearly the mind of the Holy Ghost. This then we shall do, whilst we endeavour to shew,

I. What is that Gospel which is preached to us in common with the Jews—

To the Jews were sent "the glad tidings" of a promised rest—

[The promise given them included three things, *deliverance, preservation, rest*; deliverance from Egypt, preservation in the Wilderness, and rest in Canaan. Their deliverance was to be by blood of the Paschal lamb, which, being sprinkled on their door-posts, was to protect them from the sword of the destroying angel, whilst all the first-born of Egypt were slain. That it was which burst their bands asunder, and caused their former masters not merely to liberate them from their bondage, but to thrust them out from amongst them: and from that time they were in all future ages to kill and eat the Paschal lamb in remembrance of that great deliverance. From thenceforth, committing themselves to the Divine guidance and protection, they were to subsist entirely on the manna given them from the clouds, and on the water that issued from the rock. At the expiration of the time appointed for their sojourning in the Wilderness, they were to

[b] Rom. iii. 21, 22.

to enter into Canaan, there to serve and enjoy God as their God to the latest generations.

Now all this was to the Jews "a shadow of good things to come;" it marked the ways and means of our redemption; the nature of that life of faith which we are to live, and the happy termination of our labours. And that it was so understood by the more spiritual among them, is evident, as from many other passages, so particularly from that quoted both in the foregoing and following context: for if the Rest promised by Moses had had no reference to any thing beyond the land of Canaan, David could never, after that rest had been enjoyed for five hundred years, have spoken of a rest yet future. Consequently, the typical nature of that whole dispensation was made known to them; and though obscurely, yet certainly, was the Gospel of Christ preached to them.]

To *us* is the same rest presented as an object of faith and hope—

[We are to be *delivered* from a worse than Egyptian bondage, even from the bonds of Sin and Satan, Death and Hell. And in the very same manner also are we to be delivered. "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us:" and by the sprinkling of his blood on our hearts and consciences are we to escape the wrath of God. "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins[c]." The destroying angel has received his commission against all on whom this mark is not found: and he will execute it on all without partiality or reserve: for, as "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins," so it is by a believing application of that blood to our souls, and by that only, that we can ever obtain from Christ the benefits of his salvation.

Our *preservation* during the whole of our pilgrimage must also be secured in the same way. Whilst under the guidance and protection of our God, we must "live altogether by faith on the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us." Our blessed Lord himself has told us, that HE is the bread of life: that we must live from day to day upon him, even as the Israelites did upon the manna in the Wilderness; and that, whereas they derived from it only the temporary support of their mortal bodies, we shall secure from him the eternal welfare of our souls. St. Paul also tells us, that the rock which poured forth its waters in the Wilderness was Christ; that is, a type and figure of Christ: we learn therefore from this, that we are to look to Christ for daily supplies of his Spirit, to renew and sanctify us, and to refresh and comfort us throughout the whole of our weary pilgrimage. This is to be the one constant tenor of our way from first to last. Never till we arrive in the Promised Land shall we cease to need these

[c] Eph. i. 7.

these supplies, which are to be brought to us by the exercise of a lively faith. There is no substitute for them: the life of the Israelites in the Wilderness is a perfect pattern of our life; and to theirs we are taught to conform our own.

To "the *rest* which remaineth for us[d]" we are taught to look forward with high expectations and assured confidence. There is a better country than Canaan, even heaven itself, which the patriarchs, to whom the land of Canaan was promised, themselves regarded as their destined home[e]. And to that must we look as our inheritance. "There, we shall rest from all our labours:" there, shall all tears be wiped away from our eyes. There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain: but, having his tabernacle with us, we shall dwell with him and he with us more intimately than we have now any conception of, we being his acknowledged people, and he our endeared God, for ever and ever[f].]

But as this Gospel has never yet produced what it was destined to accomplish, it will be proper to shew,

II. To what must be ascribed its inefficacy both in them and us—

The Gospel itself is not destitute of power: it is "the rod of God's strength:" it is "quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword:" it is "mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong-holds of Sin and Satan:" it is the power of God unto salvation to all who truly believe it. Yet its operations have been very limited and partial. And whence arises this? I answer,

The Jews "mixed not faith with what they heard"—

[Moses from the beginning told them of all the blessings which God had in reserve for them: yet from the beginning they were an unbelieving people. Though Moses had given them abundant evidence of his divine mission, they murmured against him, when they found their burthens augmented in consequence of his interposition[g]. When they had seen all the wonders wrought in their behalf in Egypt, they again complained, as soon as ever they saw the hosts of Pharoah pressing upon their rear, and ready, as they thought, to overwhelm them[h]. When they had passed through the sea on dry ground, and seen their enemies, who presumed to follow them, dead upon the sea shore, they were still as unbelieving as ever, and regretted that they had ever been induced to leave

[d] ver. 9. [e] Heb. xi. 9, 10, 13—16. [f] Rev. xxi. 3, 4.
[g] Exod. v. 21—23. [h] Exod. xiv. 11, 12.

leave the land of Egypt. They even questioned "whether God were amongst them or not[i]." But a few weeks afterwards they altogether renounced God, and worshipped the golden calf. Thus it was on all occasions; whenever any fresh difficulty arose, they distrusted God, and murmured against him. When the spies brought their report of the land which they had searched out, the people universally gave way to despondency, as much as if they had never seen any one display of God's power in their behalf. On this account they were all doomed to perish in the Wilderness, "God swearing in his wrath that they should never enter into his rest." In a word, "they could not enter in because of unbelief[k]."

We also are alike unbelieving in relation to the truths we hear—

[The very necessity of redemption is denied by multitudes, or at least is acknowledged only in a speculative way, and without any due sense of its importance. The Jews under the pressure of their burthens cried mightily to God, so that their groans entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts. But when has he heard from us those sighs and groans by reason of the pressure of our sins? When has he heard those earnest cries for *deliverance* from the guilt we have contracted, and from the power of our in-dwelling corruptions? Alas! when urged on these subjects, we reply in our hearts, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians[l]." If told, that "the whole world lieth in wickedness," and that we must flee from it, as Lot from Sodom, if we will escape its ruin; we despise the warning, like the sons-in-law of Lot, and regard our monitor as "one who only mocks us" with absurd and groundless alarms.

If brought to give a general assent to the truths we hear, we still do not approve of a life of faith as the means of our final *preservation.* Why must we subject ourselves to so many trials and difficulties? Why may we not go in an easier way to heaven? Why must our separation from the world be so entire? Why may we not still enjoy the leeks and onions of Egypt, instead of subsisting upon the light and tasteless food provided for us? Why must we be so dependent? Why be looking every day and hour to the pillar and cloud for direction, and never to follow my own way? Why am I to have nothing in myself, but all in Christ? Why should I be necessitated to seek such a measure of sanctification, as not to entertain a "thought that is not brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ?" We choose to have greater liberty, and an easier path. We choose to have a less humiliating way, where we may derive some supplies from a stock of our own, and be able to ascribe some measure of credit to ourselves.

Nor are we by any means satisfied with the *Rest*, that is provided

[i] Exod. xvii. 3, 4, 7. [k] Heb. iii. 19. [l] Exod. xiv. 12.

vided for us; we wish for some rest in earthly things; and murmur at the prohibition to seek it in them. Why must I have as the one object of my desire a portion that is invisible? Of the Israelites it is said, "they despised the pleasant land; they believed not God's word[m]:" and the same may be said of us. We do not estimate aright the felicity of heaven: We do not despise every thing else in comparison of it: We do not follow after it with the ardour that we ought: We shew, in the whole of our life and conversation, that we do not think the prize worth the toil necessary to secure it. Were we duly impressed with the excellency of Canaan as "the glory of all lands," we should grudge no labours or sufferings that we may have to encounter in our way to it, nor any exertions that may be necessary for the attainment of it.

What I have here said is applicable to the great mass even of the Christian world: and the true reason of their being so little influenced by all that they hear, is, that they do not mix faith with it: they either account it as a cunningly-devised fable, or else imagine that some way shall be found for the salvation of their souls besides that which is revealed in the written word. They believe not what God has spoken either of the way, or of the end; and therefore they fall short of that end, and perish in their unbelief.]

To impress this subject the more deeply on our minds, I will endeavour to improve it,

1. In a way of solemn inquiry—

[It surely is reasonable for all of us to inquire, What have we "profited by the Gospel?" If we have indeed been profited by it, we can tell, in some degree at least, what are the benefits which we have received from it. To imagine that we have been really benefited, and not to know wherein we have been benefited, and especially in a matter of such infinite importance, is palpable and wilful self-deception. I ask then, Wherein have we been profited by the Gospel? What effect has it produced upon our minds in relation to the things before spoken of? What have we experienced of a spiritual redemption? What are we yet daily experiencing of a life of faith upon the Son of God? and How far does the prospect of eternal glory animate us to do and suffer all things for the attainment of it? I pray you, Brethren, put these questions to yourselves, and satisfy not yourselves with a superficial or evasive answer. Bring forth the benefits which you have received: examine them: see how far they are of a saving nature, and bear the stamp and character of a work of grace upon the soul! If such inquiries be unnecessary, trouble not yourselves about them: but, if they will be made at the last day by the Judge of quick and dead, and will form the ground of your salvation,

[m] Ps. cvi. 24.

salvation, or condemnation to all eternity, then let them be duly weighed, and impartially answered by every one of us: for, if we be not profited by the Gospel now, sure I am that we shall not be profited in the eternal world; yea, rather, that very "Word which ought to have been to us a savour of life unto life, will be to us a savour of death unto death[n]." You all remember how greatly the guilt of Bethsaida and Chorazin was aggravated by their misimprovement of the privileges which they enjoyed under the Ministry of our Lord: being exalted to heaven in their privileges, they were cast down the deeper into hell for their abuse of them[o]. The Jews in general too would not have had sin, *comparatively*, if they had not enjoyed the Ministry of our blessed Lord: but that left them without excuse[p]. And even they will be innocent in comparison of you, if you, with the yet fuller light that is shining round you, neglect to improve the day of your visitation[q].]

2. In a way of affectionate remonstrance—

[It is clear and manifest, that the great mass of Christians do not mix faith with what they hear: for, if they did, they would obey it. Faith has the same respect to the proper objects of faith, as reason has to the proper objects of reason. From reason, we know that some things will be beneficial to the body, and other things injurious: and in accordance with its dictates we act, unless we are violently impelled in opposition to them, by some more operative principle in our minds. So will faith act. If we be blinded and overpowered by sense, we are then under the influence of unbelief. And if this be the predominant principle in our minds, Oh! think how awful will be our state! Verily, if this be of all sins the least criminal in appearance, it is of all sins the most fatal in its tendency: for whilst other sins render us obnoxious to God's displeasure, this binds them all upon us, and precludes, as long as it is in exercise, all hope and possibility of obtaining mercy. See its operation as marked in our text. Methinks we have here the veil of the invisible world drawn aside. We are in the habit of sending all to heaven: but here we see how few in comparison do really attain the promised rest. Of all the six hundred thousand Israelites that were advanced to manhood, two only were suffered to enter into Canaan. All the rest (with the exception of a few) fell short through unbelief. And this is recorded as a warning to us, that we buoy not up ourselves with delusive expectations, in reference to our final state[r]. We can never alter that word, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." I intreat you therefore to "mix faith with what you hear" from the infallible records of God's word. Mix faith with it, I say, in the same intimate and influential manner as you mix reason with the deductions of reason.

Your

[n] 2 Cor. ii. 16. [o] Luke x. 13—15. [p] John xv. 22.
[q] Matt. xii. 32. [r] 1 Cor. x. 1—6, 11. Jude, ver. 5.

Your reason soon makes you flee from a house that is on fire, and to run to a place of safety from one that seeks your life: let your faith operate in like manner, without delay: stimulating you to flee to Christ for safety, and to lay hold upon the hope that is set before you in the Gospel.]

MCII.

THE WORD OF GOD QUICK AND POWERFUL.

Heb. iv. 12. *The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

THE state of a Christian's mind should be alike distant from slavish fear and from presumptuous confidence. He is authorized to entertain a confidence, because he has Omnipotence for his support, and the veracity of God pledged to supply him with all that is needful for his spiritual welfare. But he has need of fear also; because he is in the midst of temptations, and has a deceitful heart, ever ready to beguile him. In the view of his privileges, he may rejoice: but in the view of his dangers, he should tremble. In a word, he should, as David expresses it, "rejoice with trembling." This frame of mind is supposed by many to be unsuited to that full liberty into which we are brought under the Christian dispensation. But St. Paul continually inculcates the necessity of it in order to a safe and upright walk: "Be not high-minded, but fear:" "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." But in no place of Scripture is this mixture of diffidence and affiance more strongly insisted on than in this and the preceding chapters. We are taught the indispensable necessity of "holding fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of hope firm unto the end[a];" and yet we are again and again warned by the example of the Israelites, who were excluded from the Promised Land, lest we also should "fall after the same example of unbelief."

[a] Ch. iii. 6.

unbelief[b]." It is in this view that the declarations in our text are introduced. There is an abruptness in them which renders the meaning of the Apostle somewhat difficult at first: but when the connecting link is supplied, the sense of the passage is clear, and very important. It speaks to this effect: The Israelites thought they had sufficient grounds for their unbelief; yet it ruined them. You also may be deceived by an evil heart of unbelief: but, however you may vindicate yourselves, that Word, which you now disobey, will judge you in the last day; and will both expose your self-delusion, and justify God in passing against you a sentence of exclusion from the Promised Land.

The scope of the passage being thus explained, we propose to consider,

I. The description here given of the word of God—

Many able commentators have given it as their opinion, that, by "the word of God," we are to understand the Lord Jesus Christ, who is frequently called by that name in the holy Scriptures. But St. Paul never speaks of Christ by that name: nor is there any mention of Christ in the context. On the contrary, the Word of Revelation is mentioned, as that which the Israelites would not believe[c]; as that also which excluded them from the Promised Rest[d]; and as that which speaks to us precisely as it did to them[e]. And the different things spoken of it in the text are far more suited to the written word, than to the Lord Jesus Christ. To that, therefore, we limit the description before us. Its properties are set forth,

1. In figurative terms—

[It is "quick," that is, a living word. Our blessed Lord represents it in the same view: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life[f]." And it is the very same term which Stephen also makes use of, when he calls the Scriptures "the lively Oracles[g]." The word is not a mere dead letter, that will soon vanish away: it lives in the mind of God: it lives in the decrees of heaven: it liveth and will live for ever: nor will millions

[b] ver. 1, 11. [c] ver. 2. [d] Ch. iii. 7—11.
[e] ver. 7—9. [f] John, vi. 63. [g] Acts, vii. 38.

millions of ages cause it to be forgotten, or in the least enervate its force. All besides this shall wax old, and decay: but this shall endure, without the alteration of one jot or tittle of it, to all generations[h].

It is also "powerful." Hear the appeal which God himself makes to us respecting it: "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord: and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces[i]?" Yes: there is nothing that can resist its force.

But in the text it is compared with "a two-edged sword," which, how sharp soever it may be, cannot penetrate like that. Frequently is it characterized by this image, especially as proceeding from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ[k]. Yet does that image give but a very faint idea of its power: for a sword, though it may inflict a mortal wound, would be utterly incapable of dividing, with accuracy, the almost imperceptible organs of the human frame: but the word can "pierce to the dividing asunder the joints and marrow, yea, and the animal soul also from the rational spirit." By this is meant, that there is nothing so hidden, which it cannot detect; nothing so blended, which it cannot discriminate.

This the Apostle proceeds to set forth,]

2. In plain language—

[The word is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Of the unregenerate man it is said, that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually[l]." The regenerate are "renewed in the spirit of their minds." But still they are not so renewed, but that some imperfection cleaves to all which they do: there is something in every thought and every purpose of the human heart, something which still shews that man is a fallen creature, and which cannot stand the strict scrutiny of God's all-seeing eye. If he lay judgment for a line, and righteousness for a plummet, there is not any thing in which there will not be found some obliquity. Such a perfect standard is the word of God: "it will discern between the good and evil that is in the most holy thought of the most perfect of men." In the hand of "the Spirit, whose sword it is[m];" its power is infinite, even though it be wielded by the feeblest arm. In the hand of the Prophets, it "hewed" the hypocritical Jews in pieces[n]. In the hand of the Apostles, it pierced thousands to the heart at once[o]. In the hand of ordinary Ministers, it has still the same power, and can so detect all the secret thoughts of men's hearts, as to evince it is indeed the very word of God himself[p],— — —and through him is still, as much as ever, "mighty to the casting down of the most haughty imaginations,

[h] 1 Pet. i. 23—25. [i] Jer. xxiii. 29. [k] Isai. xlix. 2. Rev. i. 16.
[l] Gen. vi. 5. [m] Eph. vi. 17. [n] Hos. vi. 5.
[o] Acts ii. 37. [p] 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.

ginations, and to the bringing of every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ[q]."]

But that which gives to this description its force, is,

II. The end for which it is adduced—

The Apostle means to say, that, however secret the workings of unbelief may be, they will all be detected and condemned by the Word in the last day. Now,

Unbelief is a most subtle sin—

[It has ten thousand pleas and pretexts by which it clokes its malignity, and justifies to the mind and conscience its operations. See it in the Jews, whom it deceived to their ruin. There was always some great trial, some apparently insuperable difficulty in their way. They supposed that God would make all their way easy, and that they should have nothing to try their faith and patience. Hence they construed every difficulty as a violation of God's promises, and a prelude to his final dereliction of them. Hence also they made their appeals upon this subject with as much confidence, as if their conclusions were undeniable: and the chastisements which they received for their impiety only increased their complaints, as though, in addition to the disappointment of their legitimate expectations, they were treated with undeserved cruelty. Thus it is with us: we hide from ourselves, or rather, we justify to ourselves, the workings of unbelief. Its operations all seem to us to be founded in truth and equity. If we look at God's threatenings, it cannot be that *they* should ever be executed, because such a procedure would be inconsistent with the Divine perfections, and an act of injustice towards man. If the promises of God be the object to which our attention is turned, they are too great, and too good to be performed; or at least, that they are not intended for such sinners as we. Besides, they are so far out of our sight, as to have, in our conceptions, little or no reality, in comparison of the objects of time and sense. Other sins we *excuse* as acts of frailty: but this we *justify*, as an act of wisdom.]

But, how subtle soever our unbelief may be, the word of God will discover and condemn it—

[The word of God is so comprehensive, that there is not in the whole creation a thought or purpose that does not come within its range[r]: and it is so minute, that there is not the slightest "imagination of a thought," of which it does not take cognizance. It is spiritual, even as the Author of it himself is spiritual;

[q] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. [r] Ps. cxix. 96.

spiritual; and, when it is brought home with power to the soul, it convinces a man of sins of which he had before not the least conception[s]. As by a chemical process the constituent parts of material bodies may be discovered, so by the application of the word to our souls in the last day will every thought be decompounded, as it were, and its every particle of good or evil be disclosed[t]. The fire that will try us will search the inmost recesses of the soul, and determine, with infallible precision, the quality of the most latent imagination there[u]. Of this we have an earnest in the events which happened to the Jews in consequence of their unbelief. Thus God addresses them by the prophet Zechariah: "Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words and my statutes which I commanded my servants the prophets, *did they not take hold of your fathers?* and they returned and said, Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us[x]." And the very same confession will, assuredly, be made in the last day by the most confident Unbeliever in the universe: "His sin shall surely find him out[y];" and it shall then be seen "Whose word shall stand, God's, or his[z]." The counsels of every heart shall then be made manifest[a];" and God be justified before the whole universe in the sentence that he shall pass[b].]

From hence we may SEE,

1. How attentive we should be to the word of God—

[Would we but inspect it with humility and care, it would be as a glass to reflect our own image, in a way that nothing else can do[c]. And, is it not madness to neglect the opportunity it affords us of learning our true character, and of ascertaining, before hand, the sentence of our Judge? To what purpose is it to deceive our own souls? Will that word be altered? Will any other standard be brought forward whereby to estimate our state? Or shall we be able either to dispute its testimony, or avert its sentence? Dear Brethren, remember the description given of it in our text: think how unavailing all your pleas and excuses will be, when its voice shall be raised against you: and now, ere it be too late, take it as a light to search all the secret corners of your hearts[d], and to guide your feet into the way of peace.]

2. How fearful we should be of unbelief—

[As

[s] Rom. vii. 9, 14. [t] John xii. 48. [u] 1 Cor. iii. 13.
[x] Zech. i. 5, 6. [y] Num. xxxii. 23. [z] Jer. xliv. 28.
[a] 1 Cor. iv. 5. [b] Ps. li. 4. with Rom. iii. 4.
[c] Jam. i. 23, 24. [d] John iii. 19—21. Prov. xx. 27.

[As there is no grace which so honors God, as faith, so there is no sin which so dishonours him, as unbelief. Other sins, though they oppose his authority, do not deny his right to command: but unbelief questions the very existence of his truth. Hence does St. John so frequently speak of it, as "making God a liar[e]." Ah! little do the Sceptic and the Unbeliever think what guilt they contract: and little do they imagine what chains they are forging for their own souls! How, I would ask, will any man get his sins forgiven? it can only be by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and by a living faith too: for it is not a dead faith that will suffice; but such a faith as unites the soul to Christ, and derives out of his fulness all that grace, and mercy, and peace which we stand in need of. Most awful is that declaration of God, that "all the fearful and unbelieving shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death[f]." Whether we believe this or not, it will prove true in the end: and the sentence, once denounced against Israel with an oath, shall again be repeated against all that abide in unbelief; "I swear in my wrath, that they shall not enter into my rest."]

3. How earnestly we should pray to God for the gift of his Spirit—

[It is by the Spirit of God alone that we can either "be convinced of unbelief[g]," or be enabled to exercise a living faith[h]. Oh! beg of God to give you his Spirit. Seek it in earnest; and you shall not ask in vain[i]. It is the Spirit's office to "take of the things that are Christ's, and to shew them unto you[k]." It is his office to make the word effectual to your souls: for it is then only effectual, when "it comes in demonstration of the Spirit and of power[l]." Read not then, nor hear the Word in dependence on your own strength; but cry mightily to God to bring it home to your hearts "with power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance[m]." Then shall you experience its life-giving efficacy, and find it "the power of God to the salvation of your souls[n]."]

[e] 1 John ii. 22. & v. 10. [f] Rev. xxi. 8. [g] John xvi. 8, 9.
[h] Eph. ii. 8, Phil. i. 29. [i] Luke xi. 13. [k] John xvi. 14.
[l] 1 Cor. ii. 4. [m] 1 Thes. i. 5. [n] Rom. i. 16.

MCIII.

ENCOURAGEMENT DERIVED FROM THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

Heb. iv. 15, 16. *We have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was tempted in all*

all points, like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

NOTWITHSTANDING the excellency of the Christian religion, when compared with that of the Jews, there were not wanting many specious objections, which a Jew might bring against it, and which, on a wavering and ill-instructed mind, might operate with considerable force. A Jew might, with some appearance of truth, say, 'We know that our religion is from heaven: we know that the sacrifices which we offer are of Divine appointment: we see the Priest actually making an atonement for us: we behold the High Priest carrying the blood of the sacrifice within the veil: and we hear him pronouncing the very benediction which God put into his mouth. You Christians lose all these advantages, and rely on mere notions of your own, which have nothing visible, nothing real.' But to these objections the Christian may reply, 'We have a better sacrifice, and a greater High Priest than you: and though we see neither sacrifice nor the High Priest with our bodily eyes, we know he is entered into a better tabernacle, that is, into heaven itself, "there to appear in the presence of God for us:" and therefore do we "hold fast our profession," yea, and will hold it fast, whatever menaces, or whatever allurements, be employed to turn us from it.'

But if the greatness of our High Priest be sufficient to determine us, what will not the consideration of his goodness be? Let us but contemplate that, and we shall need nothing further to keep us stedfast even to the end: for we shall have a perfect assurance that we shall never want any thing that is requisite either for our spiritual or eternal welfare.

This is the idea suggested in the text; from whence we are naturally to notice,

I. The character of our great High Priest—

Though he was "the Son of God," "Jehovah's fellow," "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the

the express image of his person," yet "He was in all points tempted like as we are."

[In bodily sufferings, he was tried with hunger and thirst, and weariness and pain; and had not even a place where to lay his head. As for persecutions from men, no human being was ever pursued with such bitter unrelenting animosity as he. No terms were too vile to be applied to him; he was called "a glutton and a wine-bibber," a deceiver and blasphemer, a Samaritan and a devil: and the whole nation rose against him with that indignant cry, "Crucify him, crucify him." Of his assaults from Satan, what shall we say? What words can express the conflicts he maintained with all the powers of darkness, in the Wilderness, and in the garden of Gethsemane, when through the agonies of his soul his whole body was bathed in a bloody sweat? From the hidings of his Father's face also, and from a sense of his wrath, when, as we are told, "it pleased the Lord to bruise him," his sufferings infinitely surpassed all that any created imagination can conceive. When his soul was sore troubled, even unto death, he prayed indeed for the removal of the bitter cup, yet drank it, when put into his hands, without complaint: but when he was called to endure the consummation of his misery in the hidings of his Father's face, he could not forbear pouring forth that heart-rending complaint, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Thus was he foremost in almost every trial that we can possibly be called upon to sustain; and notwithstanding in him was no sin, he was, far beyond any of the sinners of mankind, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."]

Having experienced in his own person all that we can feel, he sympathizes with us in all our trials—

[The double negation in our text is very expressive; and imports much more than a simple affirmation. Our High Priest is most assuredly a tender sympathizing Friend: and one great end for which he submitted to be tempted like us, was, that he might learn to appreciate aright our sufferings, and "be able to succour us in our temptations[a]." He now can say, more emphatically than heretofore, "I know their sorrows[b]:" and more justly may it be said of him, "His soul is grieved for the misery of Israel[c]." So acutely does he feel for all his members, that "whoso persecuteth them, persecutes him[d];" and "whoso toucheth one of them, toucheth the apple of his eye[e]." What he felt when he wept at the grave of Lazarus, he still feels, as it were, when he beholds his sorrowing and afflicted people. From whatever quarter their troubles arise, from men or devils, from body or from mind, yea, or

[a] Ch. ii. 18. [b] Exod. iii. 7. [c] Judg. x. 16.
[d] Acts ix. 4. [e] Zech. ii. 8.

or even from the hand of God himself, his compassion is the same, and his sympathy is ready to exert itself for their relief.]

Such being indisputably the character of our High Priest, let us contemplate,

II. The encouragement to be derived from it in all our addresses at the throne of Grace—

The thought of having such an High Priest passed into the heavens to further our cause in the presence of his God, emboldens us to come to God himself,

1. *Without fear*, as arising from a sense of our own unworthiness—

[Had we not such an Advocate, it would be impossible for us to draw nigh to God with any hope of acceptance. To such unholy creatures as we, God would be nothing but "a consuming fire." But, when we recollect what a sacrifice our great High Priest has offered, and that "he is entered into heaven with *his own* blood," and that he pleads the merit of that blood in behalf of his believing people, how can we doubt of acceptance through his prevailing intercession? Be it so, our sins have been most heinous: yet are we assured, that "his blood will cleanse from *all* sin," and that they who are washed in it, shall be as wool, and their crimson sins be white as snow. Had we the guilt of the whole world accumulated on our own souls, still need we not despair, since he who is our Advocate is also "a Propitiation for us, and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world[f]." If the blood of bulls and goats prevailed for Israel to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God[g]." With such an Advocate we have nothing to fear. We are sure that "him the Father heareth always:" and that "he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them[h]." He has the names of all his people on his breast-plate, and on his heart: and the chief of sinners may be as confident of acceptance through him, as those who have comparatively little to be forgiven[i].]

2. *Without doubt*, as arising from the greatness of the things we have to ask—

[All that we can need is comprehended in two things, "mercy and grace;" the one, for the pardon of our past transgressions; the other, for the preservation of our souls from sin in future.

[f] 1 John i. 2.
[g] Heb. ix. 13, 14.
[h] Heb. vii. 25.
[i] 1 Tim. i. 15, 16. ἐμοὶ πρώτῳ.

future. Now these are the very things specified in our text, as to be asked by us in the name of our High Priest with boldness and confidence: and we are assured, that they shall be granted, both in the time and measure that we need them. We are not to be accounting any thing too great to ask, because there is nothing too great for him to give. We "are not to be straitened in ourselves, seeing that we are not straitened in him." We may "ask what we will; and it shall be done unto us[k]." However "wide we open our mouth, it shall be filled[l]." Let our need of mercy be ever so great, "we shall obtain mercy;" and our need of grace ever so abundant, the supply shall be proportioned to our need. If we want grace to sustain suffering, to fulfil duty, to transform the soul into the Divine image, "Ask and have," is the Divine command: and our boldness in asking cannot be too great, provided it be of a right kind: it must not be of an unhallowed and presumptuous cast; but duly tempered with penitential sorrow, and patient resignation. Then it may rise to a confident expectation, and a full assurance of faith[m].]

But whilst we are thus encouraged to draw nigh to God, let us LEARN,

1. That nothing is to be obtained without prayer—

[It is not the death of Christ as our sacrifice, nor the intercession of Christ as our Great High Priest, that will save us, if we do not pray for ourselves. Though he is on a throne, and that throne is a "throne of Grace," we shall receive no benefit from his power or grace, if we do not sue for it in earnest and believing prayer. His offices are not intended to supersede our endeavours, but to encourage them, and to assure us of success in the use of the appointed means. Those are always characterized as "enemies, who call not upon God:" and we are warned plainly that we cannot have, if we neglect to ask[n]. The means must be used in order to the end; and it is only in, and by, the means, that the end can ever be attained[o]. Hear this, ye who neglect prayer, or draw nigh to God with your lips only and not with your hearts! Unless "in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, you make your request known unto God," you can never experience his blessing upon your souls, nor ever behold the face of your God in peace.]

2. That in all your addresses to God your eyes must be directly fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Mediator and Advocate—

[When the High Priest was passing through the veil into the Holy of Holies, the eyes of all were fixed on him as their Mediator;

[k] John xiv. 13, 14. [l] Ps. lxxxi. 10. [m] Heb. x. 19—22.
[n] Jam. iv. 3. [o] Matt. vii. 7, 8.

tor; and from his intercession all their hopes were derived. And how much more should our eyes be fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ as our Advocate and Intercessor! It is in his name that we are taught to offer our supplications[p]: and it is through his intercession alone that they can come up with acceptance before God[q]. Seek then at all times to realize this in your minds: and beg of God to make you deeply and abidingly sensible of it: for "then only do you honour the Father, when you thus honour his dear Son[r];" and then only will the Father be glorified in you, when he is thus honoured and glorified in the person of his Son[s].]

3. That when you thus approach God in and through his Son, all doubts of acceptance must be put away—

[We are not to be wavering in our minds when we draw nigh to God. To doubt either his power or his willingness to help us, is to disparage both the Father and the Son: and prayers offered with a doubtful mind will never bring with them an answer of peace[t]. It is quite a mistaken humility that leads persons to question whether such sinners as they can find mercy; or whether the grace of Christ can be sufficient for them. All such doubts betray an ignorance of Christ, and his Gospel. If he be not the Son of God, equal with the Father, then we may well doubt his ability to help: or if his sacrifice and intercession be not the appointed means of salvation for the whole word, then we may ask, Can he save such a guilty wretch as me? But if all has been ordered of the Father, and the whole work of redemption has been executed by the Son, then must we "not stagger at any of the promises, but be strong in faith giving glory to God[u]." And according to our faith, so shall it be done unto us.]

[p] John xvi. 23—26. [q] ib. ver. 6. [r] John v. 23.
[s] John xiv. 12. [t] Jam. i. 6, 7. [u] Rom. iv. 20.

*** If this be the subject of *a Charity Sermon*, the following may be inserted in the place of the last inference.

3. That whilst we derive such comfort from him, we should labour to imitate his example—

He suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should "follow his steps." He requires us to "love one another, *as he has loved us*;" and, if need be, to "lay down our lives for the Brethren." And is there not a call for our sympathy at this time? (Here set forth the particular occasion and urgency of it.) Let us then shew that we "possess the mind that was in Christ Jesus," and labour to the uttermost to extend to our Brethren such aid as shall be suitable and sufficient for them.

MCIV.

THE SLOW PROCESS OF MANY REPROVED.

Heb. v. 11—14. *We have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is as a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

THERE is in the Holy Scriptures a great diversity of truths suited to the various states and capacities of men. There are some so plain and simple, that "he who runs may read" and understand them: there are others so deep and mysterious, that persons of the strongest interlect and most extensive erudition are utterly lost in contemplation of them. In human sciences, men of genius and penetration have a great advantage over those of a less cultivated and comprehensive mind; because the strength of their faculties enables them to prosecute their researches to a far greater extent than the others can: but in divine knowledge, it is not the most learned, but the most humble and heavenly-minded, person, that will make the greatest progress. Ignorance in divine things (especially among those who enjoy a faithful Ministration of the Gospel) springs from wilful remissness, rather than from any want of capacity; and involves the offender in very deep guilt. It is on this ground that the Apostle reproves the Hebrews for their inability to receive what he had to say respecting Melchizedec and Christ. He represents their infantile state as the consequence of their own sloth, and as an occasion of considerable embarrassment to himself, since he knew not how to open to them the sublimer truths of Christianity, because they were yet so ill-instructed in its very first principles.

In explaining the drift of his address we shall,

I. Inquire

I. Inquire whence it is that men's progress in Divine knowledge is so disproportioned to the advantages they enjoy—

That many who hear the Gospel are but little profited by it, is a melancholy and undeniable fact—

[That persons should continue ignorant when little else than heathen morality is set before them, cannot be wondered at. But many, who for a course of years have had "Christ crucified set before," and have from time to time been addressed with the greatest plainness and fidelity, yet are surprisingly dark in their views of the Gospel. They think they understand the plan of salvation; and yet they confound things the most distinct[a], and disjoin things the most inseparable[b]. But, when their notions are ever so clear and accurate, they still remain without any experimental acquaintance with the truths of God. They are "*unskilful*[c] in the word of righteousness." Whatever they profess to believe respecting the depravity of the heart, and "a life of faith upon the Son of God," they have not an *experience* of it in their own souls; so that they still need as much as ever to have "the first principles of the oracles of God" inculcated and enforced. "Considering the time" that they have been learning, "they ought to have been long since qualified to teach others;" and yet "have they need to be taught the very same things again" and again. They still need as much as ever to have "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little."]

The reason for this must be sought for in their own negligence—

[If this want of proficiency had existed only since the days of the Apostles, we might have ascribed it to the weakness and insufficiency of the Teachers: nor are we disposed entirely to exclude *that* as a concurrent cause of the slow progress that is made amongst us. But the same complaints which we make, were uttered by the Apostles; and the want of proficiency in their hearers is imputed to their "*dulness* in hearing[d]," and *slothfulness* in improving what they heard. You are ready enough to hear; and perhaps, like Ezekiel's hearers, are pleased with the sound of the Gospel, as you would be with some delightful music[e]: but are you

[a] They mix faith and works, either uniting them as joint grounds of our salvation, or making their works a warrant to believe.

[b] They cannot conceive how the exercises of their own free-will must, as far as they are good, be ascribed to the agency of the Holy Spirit, while, as far as they are evil, they are not to be considered as the emanations of their own wicked hearts in concurrence with the agency of Satan.

[c] ἄπειρος. [d] νωθροί. [e] Ezek. xxxiii. 32.

you careful to apply to yourselves what you hear? Do you examine yourselves by it? Do you labour to treasure it up in your hearts? Do you pray over it? Do you make it the subject of your conversation with your families, and of your meditations in the hours of retirement? Do you not, on the contrary, find, that, through your neglecting to harrow in the seed, "the birds of the air come and take it away;" or that, "through the cares and pleasures of this world, it is so choked that it never grows up to perfection?" Yes: *This* is the reason of that slow progress which people make in Divine knowledge: *this* is the reason that persons, who would account themselves ideots if they received so little benefit from instructions in any other branch of knowledge, continue mere "babes" throughout their whole lives.]

Having found the reason of men's unprofitableness under the Ministry of the Gospel, we proceed to,

II. Shew the sad consequences arising from it—

The misimprovement of this talent is greatly overlooked among the sins we commit, or the evils we deplore. But,

1. It incapacitates men for receiving instructions—

["Babes," must have food suited to their age: if "strong meat" were administered to them, they could not receive it: instead of being profited by the deeper mysteries of the Gospel, or by a full exhibition of the Divine life as it exists and operates in the hearts of more advanced Christians, they would very probably be injured: the display of light would be too bright for their organs; or, to use the metaphor in the text, the meat would be too strong for their digestive faculties. What a loss then is this to the persons themselves! What a loss too to many who would be greatly benefited by the stronger food, but who must have only milk presented to them, lest others, unable to partake of *their* repast, should be deprived of what is absolutely necessary for their subsistence!

Let this be duly considered; and it will surely prove an effectual incentive to diligence.]

2. It imposes a restraint on their instructors—

["We have many things to say, and hard to be uttered:" not that the difficulty lies in expressing them; but in reducing them to the comprehension of persons who are so "dull of hearing." When we speak to "those who are of full age," we can enter largely into every part of the Gospel; because "they, having their spiritual senses exercised by use and habit, can discern both good and evil." They have a clear perception of the things we say, just as a man has of things bitter or sweet. We need not

be

be labouring always to prove that such or such things are bitter or sweet; because they see in an instant the true and proper quality of the things that are set before them: they understand the analogy of faith; and are prepared to follow us as far as God enables us to lead them. But, however delightful such deep researches might be, we dare not, except in a very sparing manner, prosecute them. We are forced to use the same caution as Christ did towards his hearers[f]; and as St. Paul did in addressing the Church at Corinth: "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual; but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it; neither yet now are ye able[g]."

And is not this a sad effect of men's "dulness?" Is it not an injury to us, as well as unto them? Would not our own ability in ministering be increased, if we were more at liberty to search into "the deep things of God" for their instruction? And would not the growth of all be more speedily advanced?

Let this then be an additional motive for diligence. When you see how extensive and lamentable are the consequences of supineness, learn, in pity to yourselves and to the whole Church of God, to press forward with increasing earnestness and zeal.]

ADVICE—

1. Let us improve to the uttermost the advantages we enjoy—

[God notices how long, and how often, we have the means of grace afforded us; and he will call us to an account for them as talents committed to our charge. And if the Gospel we hear be not "a savour of life unto life, it will be a savour of death unto death[h]." The opportunities of improvement which the Jews had under the Ministry of our Lord, rendered their guilt and punishment more aggravated than that of Sodom and Gomorrha[i]. The Lord grant that such may never be the effects of our Ministry on you!]

2. Let us not be satisfied with low attainments—

[It is doubtless a mercy to be "babes in Christ," *if we be really such*. But what parent in the universe, however pleased with the birth of a child, would take pleasure in it, if, instead of growing towards manhood, it always retained its infantine weakness and stature? Can God then behold with complacency such a monster in his family? Does he not expect that, from "children we become young men, and from young men we advance to be fathers in his Church[k]?" Let us then have our "spiritual senses exercised:" let us endeavour to have them matured "by use

[f] John xvi. 12. [g] 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. [h] 2 Cor. ii. 16.
[i] Matt. xi. 20—24, with xii. 41, 42. [k] John ii. 12—14.

use and habit:" let us get a nice "discernment of good and evil." Let us "desire the sincere milk of the word," not merely that we may be satisfied with it, but that we may *grow* thereby[l], and be qualified for the reception of stronger food. "In malice," or any other kind of evil, "be children; but in understanding be men[m]."]

3. Let us make a good use of the attainments we already possess—

[They who themselves "need to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God," have no pretensions to set up themselves as teachers of others: and it is much to be lamented that *such* teachers should ever be admitted into the Church of God; or, when admitted, be suffered to retain their office. But all who are taught of God, "*ought*" to exert themselves in teaching others. We say not, that all are to become Preachers of the word: but we say, that all should endeavour to instruct their friends, and their neighbours, and more especially their children and dependents[n]. In labouring thus to *do* good, they would *get* good; and "in watering others, they would themselves be watered" with the dews of heaven[o].]

[l] 1 Pet. ii. 2. [m] 1 Cor. xiv. 20. [n] Rom. xv. 14. Heb. iii. 13. [o] Prov. xi. 25.

MCV.

THE DANGER OF APOSTACY.

Heb. vi. 4—6. *It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*

IT is of great importance, in interpreting the Scriptures, to lay aside human systems, and to attend carefully to the connexion of any passage with the context; because a just view of the general scope of the passage will throw the best light upon any particular expressions contained in it. The words before us are confessedly difficult to be understood: but, if we adopt the mode of interpretation now proposed, we shall not err very materially in our explanation of their

their import. The Apostle has been reproving the Hebrews for the little progress which they had made in the Divine life, considering the length of time since they were first initiated into the knowledge of the Gospel. He complains that, on account of their inability to comprehend him, he scarcely knows how to open to them the deeper mysteries of our religion[a]; which however he must do, for the benefit of those who could digest strong meat, and make a due improvement of the truths he should set before them[b]. But, in the meantime, he warns them, that the neglecting to advance in religion is the surest road to apostacy; and that apostacy, after such attainments as they had made, would in all human probability issue in their eternal ruin[c]. Then, illustrating that point by an apt simile[d], he proceeds to exhort them to put away sloth, and with all diligence to follow those who through faith and patience were now inheriting their promised reward[e]. Hence it appears, that the attainments mentioned in the text are such as were found in persons recently converted and of doubtful character; especially because they are contrasted with other attainments which accompany and manifest a state of salvation[f].

In our further illustration of the text we shall shew,

I. How far men may go in religion, and yet apostatize from it—

Confining ourselves to the words before us, we observe, that unstable persons may possess many enviable gifts—

[*Their minds may be "enlightened"* with the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus[g]. There is not any thing which the most eminent saint can know, but it may be known by a hypocrite: the difference between them is not in the matter known, but in the manner of knowing it; the one assenting to it with his head; and the other feeling it in his heart.

Their affections may be moved by hearing and reading "the word of God," and by considering the mysteries of the Christian dispensation,

[a] Ch. v. 11—14. [b] Ch. vi. 1—3. [c] ver. 4—6.
[d] ver. 7, 8. [e] ver. 11, 12. [f] ver. 9, 10.
[g] Compare Numb. xxiv. 3, 4. with Heb. x. 26.

dispensation, or the realities of "the invisible world[h]." Their hope, fear, joy, and sorrow may be called forth successively in a very powerful manner, according as they apprehend themselves to be interested in the promises of the Gospel, or obnoxious to its threatenings[i].

Their powers may be enlarged, as well for the discharging of duties which their unassisted nature would be unequal to perform; as for the working of miracles, to which no created power is competent. By "the heavenly gift," or the *gracious* operations of the Holy Spirit, they may make some considerable advances in the Divine life[k]: and through his *miraculous* agency, "of which they may also be partakers," they may do wonders that shall astonish all who behold them[l].

It is observable, however, that the Apostle expresses himself in terms calculated to convey rather a low idea of the attainments of these persons: he speaks of their "*tasting* of the heavenly gift," and "*tasting* of the good word of God;" designedly intimating thereby, that they never lived upon the word as the *food* of their souls, or made religion their great solace and *support*, but contented themselves with a slight, transient, and superficial *taste* of both.]

Such persons may certainly become apostates from the truth—

[That they may "fall away" from *the practice* of religion, is evident from the instances of David and others, who, after a long experience of "the power of godliness," have grievously departed from the path of duty. But they may also apostatize from even *the profession* of the truth. How many are there who "for awhile believe, and, in a time of temptation, fall away[m]." The instance of Demas[n], if there were no other, is very sufficient to prove, that men may possess, not only gifts, but graces too, and yet "return with the dog to his vomit," and "draw back unto perdition[o]."]

Miserable, indeed, will their situation then become, on account of,

II. The extreme difficulty of renewing them again unto repentance—

To "renew them to repentance," is a great and arduous work—

[If

[h] "The world to come" may be taken in either of these senses. See Heb. ii. 5.

[i] Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. Matt. xiii. 20. John v. 35. Mark vi. 20. Acts xxiv. 25.

[k] 2 Pet. ii. 20. [l] Matt. vii. 22. with 1 Cor. xii. 11. [m] Luke viii. 13.

[n] Col. iv. 14. & Philem. xxiv. with 2 Tim. iv. 10.

[o] 2 Pet. ii. 22. Heb. x. 38, 39.

[If repentance were no more than a slight conviction of their folly in renouncing the truth, we might hope that a very little experience of the fatal change would bring them to it. But it implies a total renovation both of the heart and life — — — which is a work at all times difficult; but peculiarly so under their circumstances. It is said to be "impossible;" by which we are to understand, Not that it is an *absolute*, but only a *moral*, impossibility. When our Lord declared that it was "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven," he explained himself by saying, "With man this is impossible; but with God all things are possible[p]." Thus, the recovery of such apostates is quite contrary to all reasonable expectation; nor can any thing but a most extraordinary interposition of the Deity effect it.]

What reason is there to hope that it should ever be accomplished in them?

Consider,

1. The dishonour they do to Christ—

[They who renounce Christianity do, in fact, proclaim Christ an impostor: they declare their approbation of the Jews who crucified him; and thus, as far as in them lies, they "crucify him afresh." But we must not confine this to avowed infidels: the same is true respecting those who decline from the ways of God, and return to a worldly and carnal life: "they put Christ to an open shame:" they proclaim to all around them, 'I once thought that it was my highest interest and happiness to serve Christ: but I was quite mistaken: I made the experiment; I became his follower; I loved him, served him, glorified him; but I found, after all, that I had given up a greater good for a less: I now am assured that Christ cannot make us happy; and, therefore, I have again returned to the world, and chosen it as the better portion: and, whoever would be wise or happy, let him follow my example; let him renounce religion as a needless restraint, and despise it as an enthusiastic delusion: let him lend all his powers and faculties to the pursuits of time, and the enjoyments of sense; and let him cast off the yoke of Christ as an intolerable burthen.'

Who can suppose that a man, after having cast such dishonour upon Christ, should ever be brought again to embrace and honour him? While he continues to reject the Saviour, his restoration to repentance is *absolutely* impossible; because, there is no way to repent, but by returning to Christ[q]. And that he should return unfeignedly to Christ, is *morally* impossible; because his way to Christ is barred up by shame, and fear, and almost every consideration that can influence the human mind — — —]

2. The

[p] Matt. xix. 24—26. [q] Heb. x. 26, 27.

2. The despite they do to the Holy Spirit—

[This, though not adverted to in the text, is necessary to a just view of the subject, and is expressly mentioned in the same connection in a subsequent part of this Epistle[r]. It is not possible but that such apostates must have experienced on many occasions "the strivings of the Holy Spirit" with them; they must have felt many secret checks and remonstrances of conscience; all of which they must have resisted, before they could prevail upon themselves to throw off their profession of religion, and to "make shipwreck of their faith." In short, they must have altogether "quenched the Spirit," and "seared their consciences as with a hot iron." What prospect then is there that such persons should be renewed unto repentance? If they could not maintain their ground when they had the assistances of the Holy Spirit, how shall they recover it when he is departed from them? And what reason is there to hope that the Holy Spirit, whom they have so "grieved," and "vexed," by their misconduct, should again dwell in them, and increase his gracious communications in proportion as they accumulate their transgressions? If the contempt which they pour upon this Divine Agent amount to, what is called, the Sin against the Holy Ghost, their damnation is sure; it is decreed in heaven, and sealed by their own act and deed. And, though it fall short of this unpardonable sin, still is their case almost hopeless: they are like "the earth, which, bearing only thorns and briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned[s]."]

This awful subject must not be concluded without a few words of ADVICE—

1. Guard against the means and occasions of apostacy—

[He that would not fall must take heed to his steps, and be careful on what ground he treads. Now we are told by God himself, that worldly cares, worldly pleasures, worldly company are the bane of religion; and that we must guard against them all, if we would be stedfast in the faith. We quite mistake, if we think that nothing but what is palpably sinful in itself is dangerous: almost all apostacy arises from secret neglects of duty, and from a want of necessary self-denial. By going to the utmost boundaries of what is lawful, we are easily and imperceptibly drawn into what is unlawful. Therefore watch: watch against error; watch against temptation; watch against the cares and pleasures of life; watch against secret declensions: in short, "let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."]

2. Be

[r] ver. 28, 29. [s] ver. 8.

2. Be not satisfied with low attainments—

[It was to enforce this idea that the warning in the text was introduced by the Apostle: and therefore it demands our peculiar attention. Persons who, like "babes," are weak in the faith, are of course more liable to be turned from it: and if they do not grow towards an adult state, they will certainly decline. "Press forward then, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto that which is before" — — —]

3. Under any backsliding, apply instantly to Christ for grace and mercy—

[The warning in the text is not to discourage the humble, but to alarm the careless, and quicken the remiss. The Apostle does not say that repenting sinners, however they may have apostatized, shall not be forgiven; the danger is, that they will not repent; and not that, if they repent, they shall not be pardoned. Let not any then say, "I have fallen away; and therefore cannot hope for mercy;" but rather, "I have departed, and must return instantly to God in his appointed way." God himself addresses us, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely." Let a hope of acceptance aid your fears of final apostacy: so shall the end of God's warnings be best accomplished, and the fulfilment of his promises secured.]

MCVI.

THE THINGS THAT ACCOMPANY SALVATION.

Heb. vi. 9—11. *But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.*

WHOMSOEVER we address, it is needful that we use at times the language of warning and admonition. For in a mixed assembly all are not alike upright: there will always be found some tares amongst the wheat: and even the most upright may derive benefit from counsels faithfully administered. Hence, in addressing the believing Hebrews, St. Paul warned them against the danger of apostacy; declaring, that, if they did not make a just improvement of the privileges they enjoyed, they would bring upon themselves

selves an aggravated condemnation. But did he therefore conceive of them as hypocrites? No: he had a good opinion of their state: "he was persuaded better things concerning them," notwithstanding he thus addressed them: yet, whilst he acknowledged with gratitude their active piety, he urged them to abound in it more and more.

Under a similar persuasion in respect to many of you, and with similar desires in reference to all, we proceed to point out,

1. What are those things which accompany salvation—

Many things there are which are common both to the hypocrite and the true Believer: but some things there are which belong to the true Believer exclusively, and which will assuredly issue in his everlasting happiness. Wherever there is genuine love to the saints for Christ's sake, there is salvation.

But to speak more particularly—

It must be a love to the saints as saints—

[There may be a strong attachment both to individuals and collective bodies without any thing beyond the workings of nature. A great variety of considerations may give rise to the emotions of love, and the heart be as far from God as ever. Of course the bare existence of this feeling towards our fellow-creatures can be no just ground for concluding ourselves to be in a state of grace. Even love to the saints may exist on grounds which do not prove it to be of Divine origin. We may love them because they are amiable in themselves, or kind to us, or an ornament of the party to which they belong. But when we love them purely because they are beloved of the Lord, and belong to him; when we love them as members of our own body; as partakers of the same Divine nature with ourselves; and as heirs of the same glory; then we possess a grace which no hypocrite ever did possess; and which is inseparably connected with the salvation of the soul.]

But this love must be operative and laborious—

[Our love must "not be in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth:" it must be such as "works and labours in ministering" to the welfare of the objects beloved. Love of any kind is regarded as a mere pretence, if it exert not itself in such a way as to evince its reality by a corresponding practice: and much more will our pretensions to so high a principle as Christian love be deemed nugatory, if we labour not to display its efficacy by a suitable

able conversation. The temporal and spiritual comfort of the saints must be promoted by us to the uttermost. We are not to be indifferent to the welfare of any: but, whilst we "do good unto all men, we must do it especially unto the household of faith." Nor must we do it merely occasionally, when more urgent circumstances arise to remind us of our duty: we must make it, as it were, our business to promote to the uttermost the edification of the body of Christ in general, and of all its members in particular. Nor must we shrink back from any "labour" that may be conducive to this end; or any sacrifice that may be requisite to the attainment of it. And it is only when our love is thus operative, that it approves itself to be a sure evidence of grace, and a certain pledge of glory.]

There is yet one more ingredient in this love, namely, that it must be exercised towards the saints for Christ's sake—

[It must be "shewed towards the name of our God" as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus. It is this which gives to love its chief excellence. Though the saints are ostensible objects towards whom it is exercised, yet it must in reality terminate on God in them. It is to *him* that every thing must be done: but as he personally is out of our reach, we are to do it to them as his representatives. He is to be the One great object in whom all our affections centre: and not being able to pour out our ointment upon his head, we must, in testimony of the desires of our souls, pour it out, as we are able, upon all his members.]

This principle so operating, most assuredly "accompanies salvation"—

[It is declared by our Blessed Lord to be that whereby we may know to a certainty our own conversion[a], and may be distinguished for his people by all who behold us[b]. Moreover if we live in the exercise of this principle, we are assured by God himself, that "*we shall never fall*, but that an abundant entrance shall be ministered unto us into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[c]." And so infallibly is the final salvation of the soul connected with it, that every exercise of it shall be remembered, "not so much as a cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of a disciple, ever falling short of its reward." Indeed, God would consider himself as "unrighteous, if he were to forget" to recompense these things in the eternal world. Not that any works of ours can claim any recompence on the ground of *merit*: but, on the ground of God's promises, we may be assured that salvation shall be given to us, if we live under the influence

[a] 1 John iii. 14. [b] John xiii. 35. [c] 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

fluence of this love: and we may expect it from him as a merciful, a faithful, and a "*righteous* judge[d]."]

Such being "the things that accompany salvation," we proceed to shew,

II. Our duty in relation to them—

It is the duty of all to abound in them—

[It is supposed in the text that the believing Hebrews had both possessed and exercised this love: indeed, it was from a persuasion of this that St. Paul was so well satisfied of their being in a state of acceptance with God. And we too must live under the habitual influence of this gracious principle, taking every occasion to manifest it towards the saints in acts of kindness both to their bodies and their souls. "We must walk in love, as Christ has loved us."]

It is yet further our duty to persevere in these labours even "to the end"—

[We are "never to be weary of well doing:" never to think that we have done enough; or rather, never to think we have done any thing, as long as any thing remains to be done. We are not to be deterred by difficulties, nor to draw back on account of disappointments. In extending our labours of love to all the saints, we shall sometimes find that we mistake the characters of those whom we have endeavoured to serve: but we must not on this account neglect or intermit our duty. We may take the more care to discriminate between the different characters of men; but must on no account refuse to give the children their meat, because some portions of our bounty have been unwittingly wasted upon dogs. If any have abused our kindness, the loss is their own: but if we neglect to shew kindness, the loss is ours. We must never lay down the habit, but with our lives.]

In so acting we benefit ourselves no less than others—

[The exercise of love is, as has been observed, an evidence of grace, and, *as such*, a foundation of hope. And the more the acts of love are formed into a habit, the livelier our hope becomes, till at last it grows into a "full assurance of hope." We must again say, that it is not on our actions *as meritorious*, that our hopes are founded, but only as evidences of a true faith, and as evincing a state which God has promised to reward. But, having these evidences, we may as assuredly hope for glory, as if we saw the Holy Angels ready to bear our souls to the realms of bliss. "God is love: and, if we resemble him in this world, we may well have boldness in reference to the day of judgment[e]." "We know

[d] 2 Tim. iv. 8. [e] 1 John iv. 16, 17.

know by it infallibly that we are of the truth; and therefore may on safe grounds assure our hearts before him[f]."]

Let me now, in APPLYING this subject to ourselves, tell you,

1. What is my "*persuasion*" respecting you—

[Of many "I am persuaded," that they have these "things that accompany salvation." Many manifest it in the whole of their life and conversation: and many more would manifest it, if they had the same opportunities as are offered to others. There can be no doubt but that the principle of love is deeply implanted in the hearts of many, who from various circumstances are unable to display it as they could wish. And we are assured, that God, who searcheth the heart, will bear witness to them in the last day, as well as to those who were able to carry into effect their good desires.

But, in reference to many, we have no such persuasion. Many do not even possess those things which hypocrites and apostates may have; and much less "the things which accompany salvation." How many of you are there who have never "been enlightened, never tasted of the heavenly gift, never been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, never tasted of the good word of God, or the powers of the world to come[g]." Alas! Beloved, what hope can ye enjoy? Your confidence is altogether delusive, and will deceive you to your eternal ruin. But, where these specious appearances have been found, there is in too many instances an entire lack of that gracious principle of which the text speaks. The love that has been exercised has been essentially defective in all its most distinguishing points: it has not been to the saints *as saints*, but on account of some accidental circumstance that has attended them: it has not been laborious and persevering, but has displayed itself only in easier services, and on more partial or particular occasions: and, above all, it has not originated altogether in love to God; or been exercised simply for the glory of his name. What then must be my persuasion respecting you? Must it not rather be, that, so far from possessing the things that accompany salvation, you have as yet "no part or lot in this matter; but are yet in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." Beloved Brethren, think of your danger ere it be too late; and beg of God that you may rest in nothing short of true conversion, and of that "hope which shall never make you ashamed!"]

2. What is my "*desire*" for you—

[Truly this accords with that of the apostle Paul. On behalf of "every one of you," I would desire, that you should shew all diligence in the exercise of this grace; and that you should continue in

[f] 1 John. iii. 19. [g] ver. 4, 5.

in the exercise of it even "to the end:" like him also I would desire it with all earnestness [h].

I desire it, first, *on your own account*: for truly the exercise of love is a heaven upon earth. "Love is of God; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." Look at the Christians that are full of doubts and fears; and you will almost invariably find, that they are *comparatively* selfish, indolent, unprofitable servants, and greatly defective both in love to man and zeal for God. On the other hand, look at the laborious and self-denying Christians, and you will find almost invariably that they are happy in their own souls, and happy in their prospects of the eternal world. For your own sakes therefore I would say, Live in the constant exercise of love, and spare no pains to honour God and to benefit his Church and people.

Next, I would desire it *for the Church's sake*. How happy must that Church be, where such is the employment of all its members! What peace, and love, and harmony will prevail among them! What mutual edification will be found in all their social intercourse! and with what joy will they go up together to the House of God! Nor will the odour of their graces refresh themselves only; it will be fragrant also in the nostrils of many who have never experienced any such emotions in their own souls, and will cause them to say, We will go with you; for we perceive that God is with you of a truth.

But, above all, I would desire it *for the Lord's sake*, that he may be glorified; for in comparison of this all other motives are weak and of no account [i]. If it be true that "herein is the Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit," it must be most eminently true, when that fruit is such as is described in our text. Has the Lord Jesus Christ said, that "what we do unto the least of his Disciples, we do it unto him;" what delight must he not feel in a Church where all the members are vying with each other in the exercises of love! "When the spices of his garden thus flow out, our Beloved will surely come into it, and eat his pleasant fruits [k]."

To all then of every description I say, "Walk in love: and, if ye have already begun this heavenly course, labour to abound more and more."]

[h] ἐπιθυμοῦμεν. [i] 2 Cor. ix. 11—14. [k] Cant. iv. 16.

*** If this be a *Charity Sermon*, the particular object of the Charity may here be stated; and if it be not to benefit *saints*, yet if it be to *make* saints, it will be no less pleasing in the sight of God.

MCVII.

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE CHRISTIAN ABOVE THE MOSAIC DISPENSATION.

Heb. vii. 19. *The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.*

THAT the Jewish religion is superseded by the Christian, is well known: but, why it is superseded, and what relation the two have to each other, is not so generally considered.

The true light in which the law is to be considered, is this; it was "a shadow of the things which were to be more fully revealed by the Gospel," or a scaffolding erected for a season for the purpose of constructing the edifice of Christianity, and to be removed of course as of no further use, when that building should be complete. It is in this view that the Apostle speaks of it in the passage before us. He has shewn that, while the law was yet in the summit of its glory, David foretold, that a Priesthood, of an order totally different from that established by Moses, should be introduced; and that consequently all the rites and ceremonies connected with the Levitical priesthood should be done away. The reason that he assigns for this is, that the legal economy was "weak and unprofitable." Not that it was so *in that particular view in which it was designed of God;* but that it was so *as far as related to those ends which the Jews,* through the ignorance of its nature, *expected to be answered by it.* As a scaffolding is of use for the building of an house, but most unprofitable if resorted to as a residence instead of the house; so the law was good, as a typical exhibition of the way of salvation, but weak and unprofitable to those who should expect salvation by it. Salvation was, from the beginning, intended to be, and could be, by the Gospel only: "for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh to God."

It

It is our intention to mark,

I. The difference between the Mosaic and the Christian dispensation—

By "the law," the whole dispensation of Moses was meant; and, by "the introduction of a better hope," the dispensation of Christ; which alone affords a solid ground of hope to sinful men. The things which the law could not effect, the Gospel does: it gives us,

1. Perfect reconciliation with God—

[The sacrifices which were offered under the law could never take away sin. There was nothing in them that were at all suited to this end. What was there in the blood of a beast to make satisfaction to Divine Justice for the sin of man? The Apostle truly says, "It was not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin[a]."

But the Gospel points us to an atonement which was of infinite value, even the blood of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son. This might well satisfy even for the sins of the whole world; because more honour was done to the Divine law by *his* performing its commands and suffering its penalties, than could have been done by the obedience or suffering of the whole human race. Hence the Scriptures invariably represent the Father as "reconciled to the world by the death of his Son;" and as requiring nothing more of us, than to come to him in the name of his Son, pleading the merits of his blood, and relying wholly on his atoning sacrifice. To all such persons he says, that, "though their sins may have been as crimson, they shall be white as snow," and that they not only *shall be*, but actually *are*, from the first moment of their believing, "justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses[b]." In this view the Gospel is called "the Ministry of Reconciliation:" and the one message which all the Ministers of the Gospel have to declare, is, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them[c]."]

2. Perfect peace of conscience—

[The annual repetition of the same sacrifices under the Mosaic dispensation shewed, that the sins for which they were offered were not yet fully pardoned. Hence they were rather "remembrances of sins" than actual means of forgiveness: and consequently "they could not make men perfect as pertaining to the conscience[d]."

But the atoning "blood of Christ really cleanses from all sin." It "purges *the conscience*[e];" so that, being justified by it, "we have

[a] Heb. x. 4. [b] Acts xiii. 39. [c] 2 Cor. v. 18, 19.
[d] Heb. ix. 9, 10. & x. 1—3. [e] Heb. ix. 14.

have peace with God," and in our souls "a peace, which passeth all understanding." "In fleeing to Christ for refuge, and laying hold on that hope that is set before us, we have strong consolation." Divine Justice being satisfied, we are satisfied also. "We know in whom we have believed, and are assured that he is able to keep that which we have committed to him." According to his promise, "he keeps our minds in perfect peace, because we trust in him:" he fills us with "peace and joy in believing," yea, "with joy unspeakable and full of glory."]

3. Perfect holiness of heart and life—

[The law commanded, but gave no strength for obedience. But Christ procured for his followers the gift of the Holy Spirit, "by whose effectual aid we can do all things" that are required of us. *Absolute* perfection indeed is not to be expected in this life: for even St. Paul, after having ministered in the Gospel for twenty years, said of himself, "I have not yet attained, neither am I already perfect:" but *Evangelical* perfection, which consists in an unreserved surrender of our whole souls to God, we may, and must attain. For this purpose are "the Scriptures given, that by them the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works[f]." For this purpose are the promises in particular revealed, that "by them we may cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God[g]." Nor is holiness merely provided for us; it is actually *secured* to us by the Gospel: "Sin shall not have dominion over us, because we are not under the law, but under grace:" on the contrary, we shall be made "new creatures," and "be renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness." This is "that thing which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh; and which God, sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, as a sacrifice for sin, has done; he has so condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law shall be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit[h]."]

Corresponding with this difference is,

II. The distinguishing benefit which under our dispensation we enjoy—

The access to God which Christians possess, results entirely from the nature of the dispensation under which they live: and the Apostle, in speaking of it, includes two things:

1. The liberty which we have of drawing nigh to God—

[The

[f] 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. [g] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [h] Rom. viii. 3, 4.

[The whole of the Jewish Ritual tended rather to keep men at an awful distance from God than to bring them near to him. There was one court for the priests, into which they alone had admittance: and into the Holy of Holies none but the High Priest could enter; and he only on one day in the year; and then only according to certain forms that were prescribed. By these restrictions "the Holy Ghost signified, that the way into the holy place was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was standing[j]." Had any one presumed to violate this law, he would have instantly been visited, if not with a fatal, at least (as King Uzziah was) with some awful calamity.

But for us there is "a new and living way opened, through the veil[k]," which was rent in twain from the top to the bottom at the very moment of our Saviour's death. And, as by Christ "we have access unto the Father," so we are told to "come with boldness into the holiest by his blood." The golden sceptre is held out to every one of us, so that we may "come boldly to the throne of grace," assured of obtaining mercy, and of "finding grace to help us in the time of need" — — —]

2. The delight which we have in the exercise of that liberty—

[The approaches of persons to God under the law were full of burthensome ceremonies: those under the Gospel are intimate and delightful. "God draws nigh to us, whilst we draw nigh to Him." On those occasions, "he manifests himself unto us as he does not unto the world:" he "lifts up the light of his countenance upon us," and "sheds abroad his love in our hearts." Hence the Christian accounts prayer not so much a duty as a privilege: He says with the beloved Apostle, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" — — —

This arises entirely out of the nature of our dispensation, which is justly called, "the perfect law of liberty." It presents to our view our great High Priest entered for us within the veil, and "ever living to make intercession for us:" And, "having such an High Priest, we draw nigh unto God with full assurance of faith." Nor does He take less pleasure in communing with us, than we with him; for "the prayer of the upright is his delight."]

LEARN from hence the true reason why the generality of Christians differ so little from the Jews or Heathens—

[They understand not the nature of the dispensation under which they live; and therefore they get no material good from their religion: they are not made *holy* by it, nor are they made *happy*: they think that an assured sense of our acceptance with God

[j] Heb. ix. 8. [k] Heb. x. 20—22.

God is unattainable; and that communion with Him is an enthusiastic dream. They regard Christianity as little else than a milder publication of the law; reducing the demands of the law to the present ability of man, and making ample allowances for man's infirmity. They view it as a system of duties, rather than of privileges; and they expect more from their partial obedience to its precepts, than from an humble affiance in its promises. What wonder then if, when they so assimilate the Gospel to the law, they experience no more benefit from it than the law conveyed? What wonder, I say, if they never be made perfect by such a religion as theirs? Would we attain to perfect love, and perfect peace, and perfect holiness, we must look more to the atoning blood of Christ, and to the sanctifying influences of his Spirit. In the former, we shall find all that we need for our reconciliation with God; and in the latter, all that we need for our restoration to his image. The Gospel, mutilated and debased by unbelief, will bring us neither present nor eternal happiness: but if embraced, as it ought to be, with unmixed, unshaken confidence, it will prove "the power of God to the Salvation of our souls."]

MCVIII.

CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD, AND ABILITY TO SAVE.

Heb. vii. 25. *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

THE Mosaic economy was never intended to be either universal or perpetual; not universal, because many of the principal rites prescribed by it could never be performed by those who were far distant from Judæa; nor perpetual, because, whilst it was yet in all its force and grandeur, its dissolution, and the establishment of a better in its stead, were expressly and frequently foretold. The appointment of another priesthood to supersede that of Aaron, was of itself, as the Apostle teaches us, sufficient to prove, that the abolition of the Aaronic priesthood and of the whole Levitical law was to take place, as soon as that better priesthood after the order of Melchizedec should be established.

To

To shew wherein that priesthood was superior, is the great scope of the chapter before us. But it is to one particular only that we shall confine our attention at this time, and that is, the continuance of it in one person, whilst the Aaronic priests were removed by death, and constrained to transmit their office to a successor.

We notice then,

I. The perpetuity of Christ's priesthood—

"The priests under the law were many, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this man, the Lord Jesus Christ, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood." "He ever liveth to make intercession for us."

[When in a vision he revealed himself to John, he said, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore[a]." "He was indeed crucified through weakness; but yet he liveth by the power of God[b]:" and "being raised from the dead, he dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him[c]." Nor is it merely in a state of rest, that he liveth; but for the purpose of carrying on his priestly office in our behalf. The High Priest under the law, when he had offered the sacrifice upon the altar, carried the blood within the veil into the Holy of Holies, there to sprinkle it before, and on, the mercy-seat, and to offer incense in the more immediate presence of his God. This is the very thing which Jesus now lives to effect. Having offered himself a sacrifice upon the cross, he is now gone with his own blood into heaven itself, there to exhibit it as a memorial before God, and as the ground of all his intercessions. In his Father's presence he pleads it for us as a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and as the price paid for all those blessings which his people stand in need of for their full and complete salvation. True it is, that he has entered into heaven, to take possession of that glory which by the covenant-engagements entered into by the Father was to be conferred on his human nature: but yet, it was not for his own glory only that he ascended thither, but for our good; that he might carry on and perfect in our behalf the work he had undertaken for us. *Only let us contemplate the ends for which the High Priest on the great day of atonement entered into the Holy of Holies; and we shall have a distinct, and accurate, and perfect view of*

[a] Rev. i. 18. [b] 2 Cor. xiii. 4. [c] Rom. vi. 9.

of the ends for which our blessed Saviour is gone into heaven, and of the work which he is there living to accomplish[e] — — —]

But without further dwelling on so clear a point, let us proceed to notice,

II. The consolatory truth resulting from it—

As the continual changing of the priests under the Mosaic dispensation shewed the weakness and unprofitableness of their ministrations; so the unchanging continuance of Christ's priesthood shews that "he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him." Here observe,

1. What is taken for granted—

[It is taken for granted that all his people "come unto God through him." If it be asked, What is meant by coming to God through him? the answer is plain: Look unto the Aaronic priests and their ministrations, and there you shall find a perfect representation of what is experienced by the people of God in all ages. When the High Priest entered within the veil, there was but one sentiment pervading all the worshippers in every part of the temple: all considered him as their Mediator and Intercessor with God. They knew that of themselves they were incapable of drawing nigh to God: but, regarding the High Priest as their head and representative, they considered themselves as approaching God in and through him. They had no hope whatever but in the blood of the sacrifice which he carried within the veil, and in the incense which he offered there. Amongst all the people of the Jews there would not be any diversity of sentiment on this head. Thus it is that we also come unto God by Christ: we see him as going into heaven with his own blood which he has offered for us; and as presenting also the incense of his own prevailing intercession: and *in him as so occupied is all our hope.* Nor is this a mere theoretical sentiment in the Christian's mind, but a living and an abiding principle, by which he is actuated in all his approaches to the throne of grace: nor has he any hope whatever of finding acceptance with God, but by coming to him in this way.

But whilst this striking correspondence exists between the Jewish and Christian mode of approaching God, there is one remarkble point of difference, which must by no means be overlooked. The Jew, during the mediation of the High Priest, was kept at an

[e] Here a distinct view may be taken of the pleas founded upon his sacrifice, as having been appointed of the Father for certain ends, and offered by the Son in the full confidence of its being accepted of the Father, and of its prevailing for all who trust in it.

an awful distance, not daring to pass the limits that were assigned him: but the Christian has access into the secret of God's presence for himself, and may urge the very same pleas before God at the throne of grace, which his great High Priest is urging for him at the throne of glory. The pleas are the same, and the grounds of hope are the same, to each: but the superior liberty of the Christian marks the superiority of the priesthood which has procured it for him.]

2. What is plainly asserted—

[The Jewish High Priest, notwithstanding he presented all the sacrifices according to the prescribed form, could not prevail so as to obtain for the people a perfect and perpetual forgiveness: at the same period in the ensuing year he must present the same offerings again: which shewed, that a further expiation was necessary in order to a plenary remission of their sins. But our great High Priest has no occasion ever to renew his offering: nor will he ever devolve on another the office which he executes. "He therefore is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him."

The words, "to the uttermost," imply two things; namely, that he can save *completely* and *for ever*. The conscience of a Jew was never perfectly liberated from a sense of guilt by the offerings which were made for him: but the Christian is brought into a state of perfect peace, "his conscience being purged from dead works to serve the living God." Nor does he feel a need of any thing more than that which he finds in the sacrifice of Christ. He looks forward to nothing to add to it, or to give it efficacy. Being once sprinkled with the blood of Christ, his soul is at rest; because he knows that Jesus by his one offering has perfected *for ever* them that are sanctified. The Jew found his sacrifices to be little else than remembrances of his sins: but the Christian knows that, by virtue of his sacrifice, "his sins and iniquities shall be remembered no more[f]."]

This subject, duly apprehended, is replete,

1. With instruction—

[If Christians were more in the habit of considering the Jewish law, they would gain a far clearer insight into the nature and principles of their own religion. Ask a Christian, How he is to be saved? and he will give you some vague and indistinct answer about God's mercy, and his own repentances and reformations. Even the Priests themselves, who should instruct others, are not always clear on this matter. But no Jewish priest would have hesitated to point to the sacrifices as the only means of acceptance with God. Let us then learn from them, that,

[f] Heb. ix. 1—3, 11—18.

that, if we will ever come to God at all, it must be simply and solely by the Lord Jesus Christ: "He is the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by him[g]." And let this especially be remembered, that there is no salvation for us in any other way: "for no other persons will the Lord Jesus intercede; nor shall his saving power be exerted for any others." This is clearly intimated in the text. Whom is it that he is able to save? it is "*them that come unto God by him*:" And for whom is it that he intercedes? "He ever lives to make intercession *for them*." O that we might all consider this, and seek the Lord in the only way in which he ever can be found!]

2. With consolation—

[What an astonishing thought it is, that our adorable Emmanuel, now seated at the right hand of God, is living, as it were, only for us, to transact our business there, as once he transacted it here on earth. From heaven he came to offer a sacrifice for us; and to heaven is he gone again, to plead that sacrifice in our behalf. Christians do not sufficiently think of *a living* Saviour: they dwell with pleasure on the thoughts of *his death*, but scarcely advert to *the life* which he is now spending in their service above. But St. Paul teaches us to derive from this source more comfort and encouragement than any other:—not even the death of Christ itself being so rich a source of consolation as this[h]— — — Reflect then on him in this view, as presenting his own blood before his Father in our behalf, and as asking for us a daily and hourly supply of all that we can stand in need of— — — Bear in mind, that you can be in no difficulty which he does not see; nor in any danger, from which he cannot save. And, as his care of you is perfect, so let your affiance in him be perfect also.]

3. With encouragement—

[What motive can any one have for an entire surrender of himself to God, like that which is here proposed to him? Does Jesus live altogether for us in heaven, and shall not we live altogether for him on earth? Is not this reasonable, and our bounden duty[i]? — — — Dedicate, then, yourselves to him; and count no work too arduous to engage in for him, nor any sacrifice too great to make — — — It is but little that you can do for him, though your life were protracted to ever so great a length; but time is short and uncertain: therefore "Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with all your might."]

[g] John xiv. 6. [h] Rom. v. 10. & viii. 34. [i] Rom. xii. 1.

MCIX.

CHRIST THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT.

Heb. viii. 6. *Now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much he is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.*

THE use of the Mosaic law is by no means sufficiently appreciated in the Christian world. The value of a map to travellers, or of a chart to one who navigates the trackless deep, is well known: but when God has given to us a graphical exhibition (if I may so speak) of every part of our road to heaven, we never think of looking to it as the means of instruction to our souls. Yet one would think that, after the strict injunctions given to those who drew these maps, no one would be inattentive to them. The whole Mosaic law was intended to represent, in plain and visible characters, the way of life. Hence, when Moses received his instructions from God relative to the tabernacle and all its vessels, he was ordered to take the utmost care not to deviate from them in the smallest matter[a]. Of this the Apostle takes notice in the words preceding our text: Moses *was admonished* of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for *see*, saith he, "That thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the Mount." A similar direction was given to David also in reference to the temple which his son Solomon was to erect[b]. But whence arose this extreme need of accuracy? The whole plan of salvation was laid in the Divine mind; and the tabernacle and temple, with their vessels and their services, were intended to shadow it forth: and the smallest deviation from the model would have led to mistaken apprehensions about the way to life: it would either have kept back from man something which God designed to execute, or taught him to expect something which it was not God's intention to perform. But, the law being a perfect model of the whole spiritual building,

[a] Exod. xxv. 40. [b] 1 Chron. xxviii. 19.

building, the Gospel-edifice in all things corresponds with it; and, thus reciprocally receiving and reflecting light, they mutually illustrate each other, and prepare the mind for a most accurate perception of the great mystery of Redemption.

The point of which the Apostle is here speaking, is, the superiority of Christ's priesthood to that of Aaron: Having dwelt upon it at some length, he re-capitulates the subject, and gives as "the sum of" his observations, That Christ, our High Priest, is every way superior to the Levitical priests, since he is the Mediator of a better covenant, and, consequently, "has obtained a more excellent Ministry than theirs."

To elucidate this important truth, I shall consider,

I. The covenant of which Christ was the Mediator.—

It is spoken of in reference to another covenant to which it was superior. Let us inquire then,

1. What is that other covenant?

[It is an "old covenant, which vanisheth away[c]." In the holy Scriptures we read of three covenants; the Adamic, that is, the covenant of works; the Abrahamic, or covenant of grace; and the national covenant made by Israel, that was peculiar to them, and was not binding on any other people. Now it is not with the Adamic covenant that the Christian covenant is compared, because that never waxeth old nor vanisheth away: it is at this hour as much in force as ever; and all who continue under it, will be dealt with according to it, till they take refuge in the covenant of grace[d].

Neither is it the Abrahamic covenant with which the Christian covenant is compared; for they are, in fact, the same covenant, and differ only in the measure of light with which they are revealed. Nothing that is subsequent to the Abrahamic covenant has ever disannulled it[e]: and consequently, inasmuch as it never vanisheth away, it cannot be the one to which the Christian covenant is here said to be superior.

It remains then that the covenant with which the Christian covenant is compared, is that which God entered into with the Israelites in the Wilderness. This was of a mixed nature: it was, in part, a covenant of works: and, in part, a covenant of grace. In as far as it promised manifold blessings to sincere though imperfect

[c] ver. 13. [d] Gal. iii. 10. & v. 3. [e] Gal. iii. 17.

perfect obedience, it was a covenant of grace; but in as far as it suspended those blessings altogether upon the performance of those works, it was a covenant of works. The full account of this covenant is given by Moses in the 24th of Exodus[f]— — — The Prophet Jeremiah contrasts it with that new covenant which God promised to make with his people under the Christian dispensation[g] — — — and the Apostle, in the words following our text, expressly tells us, that it was of that covenant he spake, when he said it was inferior to the Christian covenant and superseded by it[h]. But,]

2. Wherein was the Christian "covenant better" than it?—

[It was so *in its own nature*, being incomparably more liberal in its terms, more rich in its provisions, more permanent in its duration. The Mosaic covenant (as I will call it) granted nothing but in a way of remuneration for services performed: the Christian covenant grants every thing upon the simple condition upon our laying hold of the covenant, and asking for the blessing for Christ's sake. The Mosaic covenant held forth only temporal benefits to those who were under it: but the Christian covenant imparts to the Believer all the blessings both of grace and glory. The Mosaic covenant waxed old and vanished away: the Christian covenant will endure for ever and ever.

It was so also *in the promises with which it was established*. The possession of the promised land, with a long continuance of peace and plenty, was the chief promise of the Mosaic covenant. It is true, there were promises of pardon and acceptance through the offering of certain sacrifices: but the pardon did not bring peace unto the conscience; nor continue longer than till the next day of annual expiation; nor extend at all to sins of greater enormity, as adultery and murder. But the Christian covenant purges away all sense of guilt from the conscience, and brings into the soul a peace that passeth all understanding: it extends to every sin that man can commit; and assures the Believer, that he shall in due time possess all the glory of heaven. There cannot be conceived any want that the Believer can feel, or any circumstances under which he may feel it, but there are promises in the Christian covenant precisely suited to his situation, and commensurate with his necessities: and all are to be apprehended simply by faith. Even the repentance which is necessary to fit the soul for the reception of the blessings, and the faith that is to apprehend them, are comprehended within the promises: they are not required of us in order that other blessings may be bestowed *as a reward* for them; but they are promised to us, *as means of introducing the soul* to the possession of all other blessings. If we attempt

[f] Exod. xxiv. 3—8, with Heb. ix. 19—21.
[g] Jer. xxxi. 31—34. [h] ver. 8, 9.

attempt to spin them, as it were, out of our own bowels, that we may be at rest in them, and make them a web whereby to catch other blessings, both they and we shall soon be swept away with the besom of destruction. But, if we go to God for them, then shall they be conferred upon us, and wrought in us by God as initiatory blessings, preparatory to the full bestowment of all the kingdom of heaven.

How much better then this covenant is than the Mosaic, must be obvious to the most superficial observer.

In order to a just understanding of the text, it will be proper yet further to inquire,]

3. In what sense is Christ "the Mediator of this better covenant?"

[Moses, in the first instance, and after him the Aaronic priests in succession, were the mediators of the old covenant. Every thing was transacted by, and through, them. They offered the sacrifices, and carried in the blood of them before God, and offered incense before God in behalf of the people; and then went forth from God to bless the people. So is the Lord Jesus Christ the Mediator of this better covenant. He is "the Daysman that lays his hand upon both parties[i]," and mediates between them. No man comes to God, but by him; nor does God vouchsafe his blessings to any man, but through him.]

This part of our subject will be more fully opened, whilst we mark,

II. The excellency of his priesthood as connected with it—

To set forth this is the chief scope and aim of the Apostle in the whole context. And, to illustrate his subject, he points out,

1. The superior dignity of his person—

[Christ is the true Melchizedec, the "King of righteousness and peace," without father (as it respected his human nature), without mother (as to his divine nature); having neither beginning of days, nor end of life[k]: "for from everlasting to everlasting he is God[l]." But the Aaronic priests were poor mortals like ourselves. Besides, the Aaronic priests were sinners, and needed first to offer for their own sins, and then for the people's: but not so the Lord Jesus: "he knew no sin:" "he was without spot and blameless:" "he was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens," even "the Son of God who is consecrated for evermore[m]."]

2. The

[i] Job ix. 33.
[k] Heb. vii. 1—3.
[l] Ps. xc. 2. Prov. viii. 22—31.
[m] Heb. vii. 26—28.

2. The transcendent excellency of his offering—

[The Mosaic priests offered nothing better than the blood of bulls and of goats: but the Lord Jesus offered his own immaculate body; yea, "he made his own soul an offering for sin[n]." True, it was the manhood only that suffered; but his manhood, having "the Godhead dwelling in it bodily[o]," was of more value than all the cattle upon a thousand hills: it was a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world[p].]

3. The glory of the place where he ministers—

[The tabernacle where the Mosaic priests officiated was glorious, as being consecrated to such a holy use: but, glorious as it was, "it had no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth," even of that heavenly "tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man[q]." There is he, not in a room darkened with a veil, but in the heaven of heavens; not in the presence of a bright cloud, a mere symbol of the Deity, but in the immediate presence of God himself; not presenting the blood of beasts, but his own most precious blood, that was once shed on Calvary; not offering a cloud of incense, but pouring forth his own prevailing intercession; not bearing a breast-plate with the names of the twelve tribes, but bearing on his breast the name of every individual of his elect; not appearing there for one people only, but for all the sinners of mankind; not obtaining mere temporal blessings, or spiritual blessings for a limited period, but spiritual and eternal blessings, even all that man can need, or God bestow; not coming forth, himself a sinner, delegated to pronounce a blessing, but "appearing without sin to confer by his own authority everlasting salvation" on all his believing people[r].

Such are the views which the Apostle gives us of our great High Priest, and of "the transcendent excellence of his Ministry."]

JUDGE then,

1. What is our duty towards this great High Priest—

[As "a Minister of this new covenant[s]," I hesitate not to say what my duty is. It is to make known this Saviour to you in all his offices: to set before you this covenant in all its fulness, its freeness, its sufficiency, its immutability: to point him out as the only Mediator of it, through whose sacrifice and intercession you must seek its blessings, and through whom alone you can obtain them: to open from time to time all the promises contained in it; and

[n] Isai. liii. 10, with Heb. ix. 11, 12. [o] Col. ii. 9.
[p] 1 John ii. 2. [q] Comp. 2 Cor. iii. 10, 11, with ver. 1, 2.
[r] Heb. ix. 28. [s] 2 Cor. iii. 6. διαθήκης the same word as in the text.

and to lead you to a simple reliance on them, as the one only means of obtaining the accomplishment of them to your souls[ss].

What then is your duty, but to contemplate these subjects with admiration, and love, and gratitude; and to seek a personal interest in them all? Contemplate "the covenant," "ordered in all things, and sure;" and expect nothing but as the fruit of God's eternal love, as expressed towards you in that covenant — — —. Contemplate the peculiar privileges which you enjoy under this "better" covenant, above all that were ever enjoyed by God's people of old — — — Contemplate Jesus as "the Mediator" of this covenant; and see all the conditions of it fulfilled *by him* for you, and all the blessings of it as the fruit of his sacrifice and intercession — — — Contemplate the "promises" of it, so abundant, so suitable, so sufficient, so sure to all who plead them before God, and rely upon them as the only ground of their hopes. In a word, look to the Ministry of Christ, as the Jews did to that of their High Priests. They expected nothing but through the intervention of their appointed Mediators: and do you in like manner expect nothing but in and through your adorable Advocate and Intercessor — — —]

2. The danger of neglecting it—

[The generality of Christians do lamentably neglect their duty in relation to our great High Priest. Instead of relying on that "better covenant," of which he is "the Mediator," they make covenants of their own *precisely similar to the Mosaic covenant*, which for its unprofitableness is abrogated and annulled[t]. They reduce the standard of the moral law to their own fancied ability to fulfil it: they look for the first motions to good to arise from themselves, from some fancied stock of which they imagine themselves possessed; and then expect ulterior blessings as a reward for their own personal merits and deserts. They will be as little indebted to the free grace of God as possible: and, instead of receiving from the Lord Jesus Christ all their salvation as the fruit of what HE has done and suffered for them, they give him no higher honour than that of obtaining for them a right and a power to save themselves. And this is the covenant which they prefer, and for which they abandon that "better covenant," which God has revealed in his Gospel. But let all such daring contemners of the Gospel hear what the apostle Paul speaks to them in this Epistle: "If," says he, "he that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden

[ss] If this be the subject of an *Ordination* or *Visitation Sermon*, it will be proper to shew here how inadequately they execute the Ministerial office who dwell on the evidences of Christianity, or on morals to the exclusion of the sublimer subjects.

[t] Heb. vii. 18, 19.

trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted *the blood of the covenant* an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the spirit of grace[u].' Mark, This is not an assertion merely, but *an appeal*, an appeal to every considerate man: and, if you will only consider it candidly, I will consent that you shall be judges in your own cause ——— If you say, 'I am not guilty of the things here spoken of;' I ask, 'How is it possible to deny your guilt, if you are systematically rejecting the Christian covenant, and substituting another of your own? or how can you be guiltless in respect to these things, when you thrust the Lord Jesus Christ from his Mediatorial office, and seek to place his crown upon your head?' Beware, I pray you, of this fatal evil: for, "how shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation[x]?" Remember, there is no other covenant whereby any human being can be saved; no promise, but what is contained in that; no Mediator, through whom we can obtain an interest in it, but the Lord Jesus Christ. Lay hold on this covenant, and you are safe: reject it, and you perish for ever ———]

[u] Heb. x. 28, 29. [x] Heb. ii. 3.

MCX.

THE PERFECTION OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE.

Heb. x. 14—17. *By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*

IT is a favorite sentiment with some, that we need not study any thing but the four Gospels, in order to attain a complete view of our holy religion. But whilst I acknowledge, that a person who studies the four Gospels may certainly learn the way of salvation from them, I must add, that his views of Christianity will of necessity be very imperfect, if he do not avail himself of the further light which is afforded him in the Epistles. To what purpose has the apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, written so argumentatively on the subject of justification by faith alone, if we do not derive from his statement a fuller knowledge of that fundamental doctrine, than

than we could have acquired without it? And who will say that he could have attained from the Gospels, or even from the Mosaic law itself, such clear views of the Priestly office of Christ as are set before us in the Epistle to the Hebrews? There the parallel between his and the Aaronic priesthood is drawn to our hands, and the superiority of his is pointed out with a fulness and precision which no uninspired man could ever have attained. The tabernacle in which the Levitical priests ministered was glorious; but Christ's was more glorious, being not made with hands, even his own sacred body. *They* were appointed to their office by a command; *he*, with an oath: *they* entered into a holy place on earth; *he*, into heaven itself; *they*, with the blood of beasts; *he*, with his own blood. *Their* sacrifices purified the patterns of heavenly things; *his*, the heavenly things themselves: *theirs*, legally, the flesh; *his*, really, the conscience. *Their* priests were only priests; *he*, a Priest to God and a Testator to us. *They* offered often; *he*, only once: *they* stood; *he* sits: *they* offered for themselves first; *he*, for us only: *they* entered the veil to come forth again; *he*, never to come forth till he shall come to judge the world: *they* obtained a temporary remission of some sins; *he*, an everlasting remission of all sin.

It is in this last view that his office is spoken of in the passage before us. The Aaronic priests offered often because their offerings could never take away sin: but he, "by his one offering, hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified: whereof, the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us."

The peculiar solemnity with which his asseveration is here confirmed, even by an appeal to God himself, will lead me to consider,

I. The truth attested—

A more important truth than this can scarcely be conceived; it is, that Christ's one offering has done that which all the Levitical sacrifices never could have done; it has procured for all who trust in it a

full

full and perfect and everlasting remission of all their sins. But,

Let us notice this truth as contrasted with the ordinances of the Mosaic law—

[The Levitical sacrifices were renewed from year to year, because of their inefficiency: but Christ's was offered only once, because it completely answered every end for which it was designed. The Levitical sacrifices perfected no man either as to his acceptance before God, or as to the peace of his own soul: as far as they had any efficacy, they prevailed only for a year; and then must be repeated, in order to obtain a further remission: but Christ's sacrifice rendered men perfect, both before God and in their own consciences. God was so satisfied with it, that he has nothing more to demand at the hands of those who trust in it: He considers it as a full discharge of all that the law requires of us, and a full price for all that our souls can need either in time or eternity. And the sinner who looks to it may well be satisfied, since God himself is satisfied, and all the demands of law and justice are satisfied. Thus, all who are "sanctified" to the service of their God, whatever their past sins may have been, are perfected, and that for ever: sins of the deepest die are purged by this sacrifice; and "*all* who believe in it, are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses."]

In this view, what a glorious truth it is!

[How *honourable to Christ!* how *consoling to us!* As it respects the Lord Jesus Christ, it shews how completely he has effected all which he came into the world to do. "He has made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity;" and "obtained eternal redemption for us." Nothing is wanting to complete his work: his one offering has effected all. As it respects us, we have in Christ's sacrifice all that we can desire. When once we recollect who he is, not man only, but God manifest in the flesh: When we recollect the covenant-engagements entered into between his Father and him; he on his part undertaking to make atonement for sin; and the Father undertaking to accept it in our behalf: When we recollect that he has been raised from the dead in proof of his having fulfilled all his engagements; and that he is now invested with all power in heaven and in earth to impart to sinners the blessings he has purchased for them: What can we want more? The soul acquiesces in this mysterious appointment, and confidently relies upon it, assured, that, if salvation is not to be found in him, it is not to be found at all.]

This truth being attested by the Holy Ghost, let us consider,

II. The

II. The testimony adduced—

The witness to this truth is no other than "the Holy Ghost"—

["All Scripture is given by inspiration of God:" and whether the writers of it were prophets or apostles, "they all spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Throughout the whole Scripture too, that Divine Spirit has one great object, which is, to testify of Christ. By the prophets he testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glory that should follow. Indeed, "the testimony of Jesus was the spirit of prophecy" throughout[a], and in this light we should regard all that the prophets have written. We should consider their words, not merely as the words of the Holy Ghost, but as a testimony given by the Holy Ghost, in order to shew us what we should believe respecting the Lord Jesus, and to increase our faith in him. And, whatever his testimony be, we should give the most implicit credit to it, adoring him for his wonderful goodness in thus condescending to teach the inquiring, and to confirm the doubting, soul. On this occasion,]

His testimony is most convincing—

[The passage cited by the Apostle, is taken from the prophecies of Jeremiah[b]. He has before cited it in a preceding chapter[c]. There it is adduced more at length, in order to shew that the Jews under the Mosaic dispensation were taught to look forward to a new covenant, and to regard their own as waxing old. In the passage before us, a smaller portion of it only is adduced, in order to mark in a peculiar manner the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Its force will be best seen by contrasting it with the provisions made for the forgiveness of sin under the Mosaic dispensation. There was no actual forgiveness of sins obtained by the sacrifices which the law prescribed: they were pardoned, so to speak, for a year only; at the expiration of which time, the same sacrifices were to be again offered, in order to the obtaining of a protracted pardon. Thus the very sacrifices which were offered for sin, were rather a remembrance of sins than a real expiation of them; so that the conscience of the sinner was never relieved from a sense of guilt, and never brought to the enjoyment of solid peace. But, under that very dispensation, the Holy Ghost testified, that provision was made by the new covenant, for the full and everlasting remission of all sin, since God expressly engaged, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more:" and consequently no further sacrifice was wanted to be offered for them. This testimony comes exactly to the point. The Aaronic priests repeated annually the same sacrifices; because the sins for which they were

[a] Rev. xix. 10. [b] Jer. xxxi. 31—34. [c] Ch. viii. 8—12.

were offered, were still kept in remembrance by God: but, in consequence of the offering which Christ has made, the sins of those who believe in him shall "never be remembered:" and consequently, without any repetition of his sacrifice, his people are "perfected for ever," being brought into perfect peace with God, and perfect peace in their own consciences.]

Hence we SEE,

1. How amply the Scripture testifies of Christ!

[It is not merely of his Messiahship that the prophets speak: they enter fully into every part of his character, and work, and offices. There is not any thing which we are concerned to know respecting him, which is not revealed in the Old Testament. The revelation of him is indeed less clear than in the New Testament, but not a whit less glorious. When the true sense of the different passages is ascertained, there will be found truths, of which the superficial reader has no conception.

Our blessed Lord says, "Search the Scriptures; for they are they that testify of me." And if we would fulfil that duty with care and diligence, and with earnest prayer to God for the teachings of his Spirit, we should find in the Scriptures an inexhaustible mine of wealth, and be enriched by them with all "the unsearchable riches of Christ[d]."]

2. What loss they sustain who receive not its testimony!

[It is a lamentable fact, that the generality of Christians are looking out for some other offering to present to God, in order to effect their reconciliation with him. Every considerate person will sometimes put this question to himself, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" And the ignorant conceit of Balak is that which then presents itself to his mind; "Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" But if men read even the Jewish Scriptures with attention, they might see how erroneous such views were, and how vain such hopes. They would see that the new covenant, which has been ratified by the blood of Christ, prescribes a very different method of acceptance with God: they would see that the one offering of Christ is a sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and that all attempts to add to it are vain. Dear Brethren, believe, I pray you, the witness of the Holy Ghost on this all-important subject. "Make not God himself a liar," as St. John expresses it, by denying or doubting this record. Be assured that he will not deceive you. If this were the testimony of a fallible

[d] Prov. ii. 1—6.

fallible man, you might well question it: but when prophets and apostles, all inspired by the Holy Ghost, concur in it, you should embrace it with your whole hearts, and rely upon it with your whole souls.]

3. How exalted are the privileges of every true Believer!

[All who are interested in the one offering of Christ upon the cross, are "perfected for ever." God has cast all their sins behind his back into the very depths of the sea. He has not only forgiven, but, if I may so speak, has forgotten, all their sins. They are blotted out as a morning cloud. True it is, that they still need the application of the same blood to their consciences, because they are yet compassed with infirmities, so that even their holy things need to be cleansed from the iniquity that cleaveth to them. They are like persons who have been washed in a bath; they are clean every whit; yet need they to wash their feet, because they contract defilement in walking even from the bath[e]. But as to all their former sins, they are altogether blotted out of the book of God's remembrance. Yet let it not therefore be supposed that they should be forgotten by us. No: they should be ever before us as a ground of humiliation, though not as a ground of fear: and the more assured we are that God is pacified towards us, the more should we lothe ourselves; and pant the more to "be sanctified wholly, in body, soul, and spirit."]

[e] John xiii. 8—10.

MCXI.

STEDFASTNESS AND ACTIVITY IN GOD'S SERVICE INCULCATED.

Heb. x. 23—25. *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering: for he is faithful that promised. And let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.*

CHRISTIANS in general do not sufficiently advert to Christian principles as a ground of action. Whilst they acknowledge their obligation to serve God, they lose sight of those considerations which alone can render his yoke easy, and his burthen light. They bear in mind that Christ offered himself a sacrifice

a sacrifice for sin; but they forget, that his priestly office, which was but in part executed on earth, is still carrying on in heaven. Were this duly contemplated, it would afford a stimulus to exertion which nothing else can give. In the fourth chapter of this Epistle, the Apostle urges it as a motive to stedfastness in our most holy profession: "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession[a]." In the passage before us he repeats the same glorious truth, and grounds upon it, not only the same exhortation, but an exhortation to various other duties connected with it. What these duties are, it is my intention at this time to point out.

Consider then,

I. Our duty as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ[b]—

It is our duty to profess openly our faith and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ—

[We are not to be contented with exercising faith in him as our Saviour: we must confess him also before men: for, if "with the heart we believe unto righteousness, it is with the mouth that confession must be made unto salvation[c]." But,]

This profession we must "hold fast without wavering"—

[The more we make our light to shine before men, the more will those who "love darkness, rather than light" oppose us——— Nothing will be left untried to divert us from our purpose. Persuasion, derision, menaces, will all be used in their turn: and all manner of influence will be brought to bear upon us, if by any means we may be prevailed upon to renounce what the world calls our enthusiasm and folly. But we must "hold fast our profession," whatever efforts be made to wrest it from us: we must hold it fast "without wavering." There must be no inclination of the mind towards the ways we have forsaken, or the society we have left: "We must forget our own people and our father's house, if we would that our heavenly Bridegroom should have pleasure in our beauty[d]." We must "hate father and mother, and even our own lives," in comparison of Christ[e]. There must be in us a determination of heart to "follow the Lord fully," and at all events;

[a] Ch. iv. 14.

[b] Some copies read ἐλπίδος, instead of πίστεως; but they both amount to the same, hope being the offspring of faith.

[c] Rom. x. 10. [d] Ps. xlv. 10, 11. [e] Luke xiv. 26, 27.

events; even though we be threatened with scourging and imprisonment, as the Apostles were[f]; or with a cruel death, as were Daniel and the Hebrew youths[g]. As for those vain reasonings by which men endeavour to justify their departure from God, they must not be entertained for one moment — — —. Our whole life and conversation should proclaim "whose we are, or whom we serve." We should be "shining as lights in the world;" and be as "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men."]

Connected with our duty to Christ as his followers, is,

II. Our duty as members of his mystical body—

We are "not to put our light under a bushel or a bed." When once we become united to Christ by faith, we become members of the body, of which he is the Head. To that body we from thenceforth have duties, even as the members of our corporeal frame have to the body of which they constitute a part. With that body we are to unite both in its public and social meetings, and not by withdrawing ourselves from it to shew an indifference to its welfare. Some there were, even in the Apostle's days, who, through cowardice or worldly-mindedness, forsook the assemblies of the Church: and some there are who do so at the present day. But whatever vain excuses they may offer for their conduct, they grossly neglect their duty, which is, to edify, as far as they are able, every member of Christ's mystical body. This all are bound to do,

1. In a way of mutual inspection—

[We should "consider one another:" we should notice each other's wants and weaknesses, defects and failings, in order to guard each other against the very beginnings of declension in the Divine life, and to stimulate one another to exertion in the cause of truth and love. We should mark also one another's abilities and opportunities for serving God, in order that the energies of all may be employed to the best effect. The members of our natural body, if attempting to execute offices for which they are not fitted, can effect little; but, when exerting themselves in their appropriate sphere, they all contribute to the general good. Thus should all the members of the Church seek out for themselves, and assign to each other, such offices as they are best qualified to perform;

[f] Acts iv. 19, 20. [g] Dan. iv. 18. & vi. 10.

form; that, each labouring in his proper vocation, ("he that ministereth, for instance, or teacheth, or exhorteth, or giveth, or ruleth," in the due discharge of their respective duties[h],) the whole body may be edified, and God's name be glorified.]

2. In a way of mutual excitation—

[Love, both in its feelings and actings, is apt to languish, if it be not watched, and cherished, and quickened to activity, from time to time. "This gift of God that is in us, needs to be stirred up," and fanned to a flame, by mutual exhortations. Hence we are told to "provoke one another unto love and to good works." No member of the body should be idle: there are some good works which all may perform: and all should be penetrated with a desire to do what they can. It is by the unwearied exertion of all their powers that the designs of God are to be accomplished, both in the Church and in the world. But, as all are apt to be remiss, all should exhort and animate one another, and, "so much the more as we see the day approaching." The final destruction of Jerusalem was very near at hand when this Epistle was written: and that period would be most afflictive to the Church who fled to the mountains, as well as to those who abode in the city: and therefore they all needed to prepare for that trial, and to labour with redoubled zeal for the Lord, whilst an opportunity of serving him was afforded them. And to us also, there is a day of trial near at hand, even the day of death, and of our appearing before God in judgment. Then all our opportunities of serving and honouring God will be terminated for ever. Oh! how diligent then should we be in redeeming the present time, and in labouring whilst it is day; seeing that the night, when no man can work, is so near at hand! To impress these thoughts on each other's minds, and to stimulate one another to activity in the consideration of them, is our bounden duty: and whatever we may imagine about serving God acceptably in secret, whilst we neglect these public and social duties, we shall find ourselves awfully mistaken, when God shall call us to account for "hiding our talent in a napkin."]

Such being our duties to Christ and his Church, let us notice,

III. Our encouragement to perform both the one and the other—

God is faithful to his promises—

[Great, "exceeding great and precious are the promises" which he has given us in his word; promises suited to every state in which every member can be placed. In the covenant of grace they are all contained, even in that covenant of which Christ is the Mediator and Surety: and "in Christ they are all yea

[h] Rom. xii. 7, 8.

yea and amen, to the glory of our covenant-God and Father[i]." Not one of them shall ever fail of accomplishment: for "God is not a man, that he should lie, or the son of man, that he should repent." Indeed, "he has confirmed his promises with an oath, that, by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong consolation." The experience of all ages attests this blessed truth, that God is faithful to his promises. Joshua's appeal to all Israel, at the close of his long-protracted life and warfare, may be made also to every child of Abraham; "Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you; and not one thing hath failed thereof[k]."]

This consideration may well animate us to the performance of all our duties—

[If no promises had been given us, we might well have been discouraged: for who could "engage in such an unequal warfare at his own charges?" In like manner, if the promises had been less extensive, or less free, we might well despond; because we could have never merited the performance of them, nor ever have supplied what might be lacking in them. Moreover, if there had been any room to question God's fidelity, we should still have been equally far from any solid comfort. But when we find the promises so perfectly free, that all are at liberty to lay hold upon them; and so full, that they extend to every possible want; and so sure, that sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of them shall fail; do we not feel encouraged to embrace them, and to rely upon them, and to plead them, and to go forth in the strength of them to serve our God? Is not this one word, "My grace is sufficient for thee," a full warrant for undertaking any service, or for meeting any trial, to which God may call us? May we not boldly say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me?"

Here then is our encouragement to perform our duties to Christ and his Church. Whatever we may have to encounter for Christ's sake, we may, in reliance upon his word, "hold fast our profession:" and whatever exertion may be necessary for filling up our respective offices as members of his body, we may labour and not faint; assured that, if we be "stedfast, and unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord[l]."]

WHAT THEN SHALL I SAY MORE? Is God faithful to his engagements? then,

1. Be ye faithful to yours—

[If

[i] Cor. i. 20. [k] Josh. xxiii. 14. [l] 1 Cor. xv. 58.

[If you have given up yourselves to him as his purchased possession, then have ye bound yourselves to "glorify him with your bodies and your spirits which are his." Remember then the vows that are upon you; those which were made for you in your baptism; those which you took upon yourselves at your confirmation; and those which you have renewed at the table of the Lord. Labour diligently to perform them all; and not only to perform your own promises, but to stir up others to the performance of theirs also. Do not think to say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" for you have a duty to all the members of Christ's mystical body; and you are as much bound to perform that, as to perform any other whatever. Address yourselves then to the work of the Lord; and "whatever your hand findeth to do, do it with all your might." If you meet with difficulties and trials, be not discouraged, but go on boldly in the name and strength of the Lord. Draw not back on any account: for, "if any man draw back, God will have no pleasure in him." "He only who endureth to the end shall be saved." "Look to yourselves then, that ye lose not the things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward [m]." "Be faithful unto death; and God will give you a crown of life."]

2. Live by faith upon the promises—

[It is "by the promises that ye have already been made partakers of a divine nature [n];" and "by them must ye cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God [o]." Lay hold then on the promises: search them out with care: plead them before God with earnestness: and expect the accomplishment of them with confident assurance. This is the great secret of living unto God. This will keep up a continual intercourse between God and the soul. This will bring down Omnipotence to your aid. This will make every trial light, and every duty easy. This will enable you to defy all your enemies, and to challenge them all, whether individually or collectively, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ [p]?" This will render you blessings to others, as well as blessed in your own souls: for those who behold your light, will "thank God, and take courage," and be emboldened to serve God with increased alacrity themselves. Thus too you will be prepared for "the day that is approaching:" for whilst the idle and unprofitable servant will be "cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth," the active and faithful servant will receive the plaudits of his Divine Master, and will "enter into the joy of his Lord."]

[m] 2 John 8. [n] 2 Pet. i. 4.
[o] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [p] Rom. viii. 35—39.

MCXII.

THE EVIL AND DANGER OF APOSTACY.

Heb. x. 26—31. *If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace! For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord: And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

WE cannot be too strongly on our guard against attaching ourselves to human systems in religion. The partisans of human systems take a partial view of the Scriptures, leaning invariably to those passages which appear to sanction their favourite dogmas, and excluding all mention of those which have a contrary aspect. They all take it for granted, that the things which they know not how to reconcile, are contrary to, and inconsistent with, each other. But, as in a machine wheels may move in opposite directions, and yet so harmonize as to subserve one common end, so, in the word of God, truths, which have an opposite aspect, may be perfectly reconcileable to each other; and equally conducive to the accomplishment of the Divine purposes. The apostle Paul insisted, as strongly as any one could do, on the doctrines of grace, shewing that all was ordered by God according to the counsel of his own will: yet no Apostle spoke more strongly than he on the Danger of Apostacy; or taught more forcibly the necessity of continual watchfulness on our part in order to the attainment of those blessings which God had from all eternity prepared for us. It is on this subject that he is speaking in the passage before us; wherein he cautions the Hebrew converts against apostacy, bidding them

them to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering; and warning them, that, if they turned back from God, it would be to their everlasting perdition. In the words which I have just read, he sets forth,

I. The evil of apostacy—

It is not of all sin, or even of all wilful sin, that he speaks; for, if there were no pardon for wilful sin after baptism, or after we have embraced the Gospel, who could hope ever to attain salvation, since there is not a man in the universe who has not, on some one occasion at least, knowingly and wilfully done what he ought not, or left undone what he ought, to have done. The sin spoken of in the text, is, a total and wilful apostacy from the Gospel of Christ. This appears from the whole context, both from that which precedes, and that which follows. In the preceding context he bids them to "hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering;" and then he adds, "*for*, if we sin wilfully;" that is, by renouncing our holy profession, we reduce ourselves to the most awful condition that can be imagined; seeing that, having put away all affiance in the sacrifice of Christ, there remains no other sacrifice for our sins. In the following context the sin is opened at large under three separate heads, which, whilst they mark distinctly the nature of the sin which is intended, display the evil of it in most tremendous colours.

Let us consider each of them in its order—

[Apostacy, he tells us, is a "treading under foot the Son of God." The Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, came down from heaven to seek and to save them that were lost. We, when we are baptized in his name, or make a profession of faith in him, acknowledge him before all to be the Saviour of the world. All other lords we then renounce; and all other grounds of hope before God; and in effect we say with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God[a]." But when we renounce our faith in him, we, as far as in us lies, cast him down from his throne, and trample him under our feet; declaring, that he is unworthy of the honour which we had erroneously

[a] John, vi. 68, 69.

neously put upon him, and that we will "no longer have him to reign over us:" yea, we even "crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame[b]."

Next, it is a "counting of the blood of the covenant an unholy thing." The Mosaic covenant was ratified with blood; and with that blood both the tabernacle with all its vessels, and the people who worshipped before it, were sanctified, and set apart as holy to the Lord[c]. The covenant of grace is ratified with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and, when we "come to the knowledge of the truth," we also are sanctified with it, and set apart to the service of our God. We profess to consider that blood as the one procuring cause of all that we either have or hope for: and we look for all the blessings of the covenant solely through the merit of his blood as shed for us, and as sprinkled on us. But, when we cast off our profession, we declare before all, that we consider the blood of Christ as having no virtue at all as an atonement for sin, and as being, in fact, of no more efficacy than the blood of bulls and goats, or even of a malefactor, justly put to death.

Further, it is a doing of "despite unto the Spirit of grace." The Holy Spirit, both before and after the death of Jesus, bare witness to him by signs and wonders innumerable: and, when we are brought to the knowledge of the truth, it is by that same blessed Spirit illuminating our minds, and sealing the truth with power upon our souls. But, when we renounce the truth we have received, we insult that Divine Agent as having borne witness to a falsehood: and we ascribe all his miracles either to Satanic agency, or to some mysterious imposture. We even laugh also at the impressions which he has made upon our minds, and deride all his merciful suggestions as fanaticism and delusion.]

In this view of apostacy, say, if it be not a most tremendous evil?

[Those who are guilty of it, speak of it only as a change of sentiment resulting from conviction; and thus they take credit to themselves as having grown in wisdom, and been faithful to their convictions. But God seeth not as man seeth. God beholds all the evils of the heart which have been accessary to this change; and all the injury that results from it, both to his honour, and to the world at large. He sees the pride of heart which will not receive the truth upon his testimony. He sees the love of the world which operates to draw the heart from him; yea, and the enmity of the heart against him, which will not submit, either to be saved or governed in so mysterious a way. In other sins he beholds only a resistance to his authority; but in this, a contempt of all the wonders of his wisdom and love. A person, who has never received the knowledge of the truth, cannot commit this sin, or any sin

[b] Heb. vi. 6. [c] Heb. ix. 18—21.

sin of equal malignity. It is the resisting of light that has been imparted, and the acting contrary to it to such an extent as to call it darkness; this it is which makes the guilt so great, that, humanly speaking, it can never be forgiven. Were it indeed repented of, and were mercy sought through the blood of Jesus, even this sin, great as it is, might be forgiven: but the commission of it implies such desperate wickedness and obduracy, that it never can, without a miracle of mercy, be repented of[d].]

Hence then may be seen,

II. The danger of it—

This is declared,

1. From the very nature of the sin itself—

[Consider what the sin is: it is a discarding of the only remedy which God has provided for the necessities of fallen man. Under the Mosaic dispensation, God revealed himself to the Hebrews as the only true God; and entered into covenant with them to be their God, if they would serve him in sincerity and truth. But, if any one *made void* that law[e], and departed from him to worship other gods, he appointed, that, upon the fact being proved by two or three witnesses, the offender should be stoned to death[f]; and it was expressly forbidden to any person to conceal the crime; if it should have been committed by a man's dearest friend or relative, he must reveal it to the constituted authorities, and take the lead in executing sentence on the offender[g]. In this law the Hebrews had acquiesced as holy, and just, and good. (Here let me suggest, by the way, that the illustration here brought by the Apostle farther shews, what the sin was of which he spake; namely, that it was not *every* wilful sin, but a wilful renunciation of the Gospel of Christ.) Now, says the Apostle, if so severe a sentence was executed, without any mercy, on the contemner of the Mosaic covenant, and the judges themselves declared the offender to be "*worthy of it*[h]," "of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who has renounced the Christian covenant; since he has trodden under foot the Son of God, &c.!" Here he appeals to them, and makes them judges in their own cause. And to you also do I appeal. If they who renounced that legal covenant, the provisions of which were chiefly of a temporal nature, and the engagements of it ratified only with the blood of beasts, were counted worthy of such a tremendous punishment as death; of how much sorer punishment must he be worthy, who renounces the covenant of grace, in which all the blessings of grace and glory are made over to us, and which has been ratified and confirmed with the blood of God's only dear Son? I consent that you

[d] Heb. vi. 4—6. [e] ἀθετήσας, ver. 28. [f] Deut. xvii. 2—7.
[g] Deut. xiii. 6—9. [h] Deut. xvii. 6.

you shall be judges in your own cause, and the arbiters of your own fate. They who renounced the law were guilty of most egregious folly and ingratitude: but their impiety was not to be compared with yours: for whilst, as renouncing the only means of salvation, you resemble them, your impiety is greater than theirs, in proportion as the covenant which you despise is more glorious than theirs, and the mercies which you reject have been purchased for you at a dearer rate.

Know then, that to such persons "there remains no more sacrifice for sins." Under the law, the sacrifices were repeated from year to year: but not so under the Gospel: Christ will never die for your sins again; nor will any other offering be made in his stead: and therefore, having renounced him, "nothing remains for you but a certain fearful looking for of judgment," whilst you continue here; and "a fiery indignation," when you go hence, "that shall devour all the adversaries" of God and his Christ. Even *here*, I say, the punishment of such persons is awful: for, to say the least, they are in a state of uncertainty what shall be their fate in the eternal world; and they have frequently in their minds and consciences such an anticipation of their doom, as appals their souls, and terrifies their spirits, and forms a very hell within them: and the moment they go hence, the wrath of an incensed God comes upon them to the uttermost.]

2. From the fixed determination of God to punish it—

[God has said, "Vengeance belongeth unto me; and I will recompense[i]." And again, "The Lord shall judge his people[k]." Now if he, as the moral Governor of the universe, has determined to execute justice, as well as to shew mercy; and if the administering of justice be no less necessary to his own glory than the dispensing of mercy, what have the contemners of his Gospel to expect? He has said, he will thus display his righteousness at the last day: and "We know him who has said it:" we *know* that he is almighty, and therefore able to inflict punishment; and we *know* he is true, and therefore will fulfil his word. It is in vain to think that he will change: for "he is not a man, that he should lie; or the son of man, that he should repent." Seeing then that he will take the matter into his own hands, judge ye, whether it be not "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Were it only *a mortal man* that was incensed, and you had no way of escape from him, it were a terrible state for you to be in: but what must it be to be exposed to the wrath of *the living God*, who, whilst he ever lives to execute vengeance, will preserve you in existence, that you may eternally endure it? Think of enduring "*the wrath of the Lamb*," which will

[i] Deut. xxxii. 35. [k] ib. ver. 36.

will be so much the more terrible, in proportion as his mercy in submitting to be slain for you has been slighted and despised.]

"Suffer ye then, Brethren, a word of EXHORTATION"—

1. Watch and pray against every wilful sin—

["Keep thy servant from presumptuous sin," said David; "then shall I be innocent from the great transgression[l]." Now, though it is true that every wilful sin, or every presumptuous sin, does not involve us in all the guilt of apostacy, yet it leads to apostacy as its natural end and issue; because it hardens the heart, and sears the conscience, and grieves the Holy Spirit, and provokes God to leave us to ourselves: and, if once God say of us, "They are joined to idols; let them alone[m];" our doom is sealed, and our perdition sure. Let me then affectionately intreat you to guard against every wilful sin, whether of commission or omission. A man does not become an apostate all at once: he first indulges some secret lust, some filthiness either of the flesh or spirit. Then he declines into formality in his secret walk with God: then his begetting sin gets an ascendant over him: then he becomes indifferent to public ordinances; and so, from opposing the Gospel in his heart and life, he comes to abandon it even in profession, and to relapse into avowed infidelity, and a contempt of all true religion[n]. The misery which such persons frequently endure in this life, is sufficient to make us dread such an event as this — — — But that which the apostate soul shall endure in the eternal world, surpasses all conception. It would have been better for such an one never to have known the way of righteousness, than, having known it, to desert it, and make shipwreck of his faith[o].]

2. Bear in mind your obligations to Christ and to his Holy Spirit—

[Why did the Lord Jesus Christ die under the load of all your guilt? Was it that you might continue in your sins? — — — Why did the Holy Spirit undertake to renew and sanctify your souls; and why has he begun a work of grace in your hearts? Was it that you might "return again with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to a wallowing in the mire?" Let then the Lord Jesus Christ behold in you the fruits of his love — — — and let the Holy Spirit rejoice in beholding in you the efficacy of his grace — — — Then it will be no formidable thing to "fall into the hands of the living God:" on the contrary, you may then with joyful hope look forward to the time of your departure, and, after the example of that Saviour in whom you have believed, you may say in your dying hour, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."]

[l] Ps. xix. 13. [m] Hos. iv. 17.
[n] Eccl[us]. xix. 1. [o] 2 Pet. ii. 20—21.

MCXIII.

THE BENEFIT OF PAST EXPERIENCE.

Heb. x. 32. *Call to remembrance the former days.*

TO take a retrospect of our past lives, is the duty of every Child of man. Without a frequent revision of the past, no man can repent, no man believe, no man be saved. We must be sensible of our guilt and helplessness, before we can ever come aright to Christ for mercy and grace: and such a consciousness of our need of him can proceed from nothing but self-knowledge, the fruit of much self-examination and of a diligent inquiry into our own state. But it is not in this general view that we are now to consider the subject before us. The words were addressed to those who "had been illuminated" with Divine truth, and had "endured a great fight of afflictions" in the service of their Divine Master. It is to such therefore that we propose chiefly, if not exclusively, to limit our attention, whilst we notice the exhortation,

I. As given to the Jewish converts—

They were subjected to cruel persecutions throughout the world: and they were in danger of yielding to intimidation, and of making shipwreck of their faith. To fortify their minds and encourage their hearts, he bids them "call to remembrance the former days."

These days deserved remembrance—

[They had been days of heavy trial to all who had embraced the Christian faith. Every convert was an object of hatred and contempt both to Jews and Gentiles. No reproaches were too bitter to cast upon the followers of Christ, no injuries too heavy to inflict upon them. Their persons were assaulted, their property destroyed—their lives menaced, and in many instances sacrificed to royal edicts, to popular fury, or to legal form. The community of interest which all felt in the welfare of the whole body, greatly augmented the sufferings of every individual. Wherever one member suffered, all the members suffered with it.

Yet in the midst of all these afflictions, the believing Jews, as a body

a body, had maintained their stedfastness, and held fast their profession. They had not only submitted to the loss of all things for the sake of Christ, but "had taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods;" "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for their Redeemer's sake."

To this measure of firmness they had attained by keeping their eye steadily fixed upon the heavenly state, where their portion was, and where an infinitely "better and more enduring substance" was treasured up for them. They had no doubt but their trials would be richly recompensed in the eternal world; and therefore they made light of all that they possessed below; "reckoning that the sufferings of this present time were not worthy to be compared with the glory that should be revealed in them[a]."

Such were their former days, immediately after the light of divine truth had shone into their hearts; and]

The recollection of them would be of singular utility to them at this time—

[From a review of their past experience, they would see, that, though the difficulties which they now had to sustain, or which they were daily expecting to encounter, were formidable, they were not new, nor insupportable, nor unprofitable. They were *not new*; since they were no other than what had come upon them from the beginning: and consequently were not to be regarded as "strange" and unlooked for[b]: *Nor* were they *insupportable*; for every convert had already borne them for a long period; and consequently might, with the help of Divine grace, support them still: *Nor* were they *unprofitable;* since the effect of them had been to drive the sufferers to prayer, and to bring down into their souls an increase both of grace and peace. In a word, the tribulations which they had already endured, "had wrought patience, and experience, and hope;" and therefore, instead of trembling at the prospect of future trials, it became every Believer to hold fast the profession of his faith, and, together with that, the rejoicing of his hope firm unto the end."]

What we have spoken sufficiently shews the scope of the Apostle's advice as given to the Hebrews to whom he wrote; and having ascertained that, we are prepared to consider it,

II. As applicable to ourselves—

That there are many amongst ourselves, who, through the tender mercy of our God, "have been illuminated" with Divine truth, we firmly believe: and

[a] Rom. viii. 18. [b] 1 Pet. iv. 12.

and to a certain extent the same consequences have followed, and do still follow, a profession of the Gospel in these latter times, as in the days of old. To all of you then who have been illuminated, we would offer the same advice as the Apostle did to the Hebrew converts, persuaded that it will be profitable,

1. For our humiliation—

["Call to remembrance the former days," when first ye received the knowledge of the truth, and see whether there was not much in your experience then, which may justly operate for your humiliation now. You then saw and bewailed your lost estate both by nature and practice, and gladly fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ, as to the hope set before you in the Gospel. Having obtained a view of him as your Redeemer and your all-prevailing Intercessor, you rejoiced in him with joy unspeakable, so that you seemed to be come as it were into a new world. Then the cares and pleasures of this life appeared to you as empty vanities, that were scarcely worth a thought: and then, whatever you were called to suffer, whether of loss or shame, for Christ's sake, appeared to you rather a ground of joy, than of sorrow, insomuch that "you took joyfully" the injuries that were inflicted on you, and rejoiced that you were counted worthy to sustain them for Jesus' sake. Nothing intimidated you; nothing was suffered to retard your progress. With the world under your feet, and heaven in your eye, you went on cheerfully, and made your profiting daily to appear.

But now perhaps your love has grown cold; your delight in the word of God and prayer has abated; your exertions in the pursuit of heavenly things have languished; and the power of Divine grace upon your souls has visibly declined. Now prudence has not merely regulated (for *that* it ought to do) your zeal, but has greatly abated, if not altogether superseded, it. Now the cares of this life have regained an ascendant over you: the frowns of the world, which once were disregarded, are become formidable in your eyes; and the fear of suffering loss in your worldly interests damps all your ardour. Now, instead of being altogether crucified to the world, and living only unto God, as in former days, you can scarcely be distinguished, except by an outward profession, from those who, were never yet irradiated by the light of Gospel truth. Is this an uncommon case? Would to God it were! but what we see in the Church of Ephesus of old is yet visible, wherever the Gospel has been long preached.—Of them the Lord Jesus says, "Thou has borne, and hast had patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen; and repent, and do the first works[c]. So then say I to you; "Call to remembrance the former days:" remember what you once were, and what your former works: and let the view of your declension fill you with shame and sorrow and contrition. Be afraid and tremble, lest the Lord withdraw from you the light with which you have been illumined; and beg of him to return in mercy to your souls, and to "strengthen in you the things which remain, and are ready to die[d]."]

2. For your encouragement—

[It may be that either outwardly from men, or inwardly from Satan, you are strongly tempted at this time, and need to have a word of consolation and encouragement spoken to your souls. If this be the case, "Call to remembrance the former days." Trials have not for the first time come upon you now: you have in a greater or less degree experienced them from the time that ye were first illuminated. Who is it then that strengthened you to bear them at that time? Is he not still as able and as willing to help you as ever? Is not the grace of Christ as sufficient for you now as in former days? And does he not deserve as much at your hands now as he did formerly? If you rejoiced in doing and suffering for him years ago, is there not the same reason that you should do so now? If there was "a needs that you should be in heaviness through manifold temptations" formerly[e], may there not be the same occasion still? and if the "trial of your faith was precious to you heretofore, yea more precious than gold, because you knew it would be found to your praise and honour and glory, as well as to the praise and honour and glory of your Lord, at his appearing[f]," should it not be alike precious now? If too an assured prospect of "a better and an enduring substance in heaven" once made all earthly things appear to you so light, that you could take joyfully the loss of all of them in the prospect of it, is it not of equal value now? or do you think that, when you shall have obtained the enjoyment of it, you will regret the sacrifices which you made with a view to it." Then I say, "Continue to walk by the rule whereto ye have attained[g];" and "look to yourselves that ye lose not the things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward[h]."]

Let me improve the subject in a more particular ADDRESS,

1. To those who have never yet been illuminated by the Gospel of Christ—

[How

[c] Rev. ii. 3—5. [d] Rev. iii. 2. [e] 1 Pet. i. 6.
[f] 1 Pet. i. 7. [g] Phil. iii. 16. [h] 2 John 8.

[How painful should the review of former days be to you! Oh! the seasons you have lost! the mercies you have abused! the guilt you have contracted! How differently have your lives been spent from what they would have been if you had been Christians indeed! You would have been fleeing from the wrath to come, and would have so made your light shine before men, as to "condemn the world" around you, even as Noah did when he built the ark: and you would have found in Christ such peace as passeth understanding, and such joy as should have infinitely overbalanced all that you could ever do or suffer for him. But of persecution for righteousness' sake you know nothing; and still less of that high attainment of glorying in tribulation for the sake of Christ. Look back then to the days that are past, and be confounded before God because of your impiety: and pray that "the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened," and that you may yet be "brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of his Gospel." Be thankful to God that the light yet shines around you: and, "While ye have the light, be careful to walk in the light;" and "Give glory to the Lord your God before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. But, if ye will not hear this admonition, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore and run down day and night," because of the awful judgments that await you[i].]

2. To those who, though illuminated by the Gospel, are not walking in the enjoyment of the Divine presence—

[This may arise from temptation and spiritual bondage, or from sloth and carnality, and worldly-mindedness. If it have arisen from the former, God forbid that I should "break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax:" let me rather "hold up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees, and encourage the fearful heart." Well I know that the soul of a righteous man may be bowed down with spiritual distress, and be so sore troubled under the hidings of God's face, as to be deaf to the voice of consolation. Such was the state of David at one time[k]; and the remedy to which he betook himself was precisely that which is recommended in my text. "I considered," says he, "the days of old, the years of ancient times. *I call to remembrance my song in the night*[l]." Then comparing his present painful experience with that which he had formerly enjoyed, he acknowledges, that all his present doubts and fears were the result of "his own infirmity." And then, to prevent the return of any such distressing apprehensions, he adds, "I will remember the works

[i] Jer. xiii. 16, 17. [k] Ps. lxxvii. 2—4. [l] ib. ver. 5—10.

works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old[m]." Thus then do ye: Call to remembrance the experience of former saints, and your own also at more favoured seasons: and then bear in mind that, though you change, God is the same, and that "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

But if, as in too many instances is the case, your darkness arise from a relaxation of your diligence, and an indulgence of worldly or carnal affections, I must "change my voice, for I stand in doubt of you;" and would have you also stand in doubt of yourselves, till it be clear that "Christ is formed in you" of a truth. If you are drawing back from God in secret, beware lest he leave you to yourselves to "go back to everlasting perdition." To "have run well for a season," will be of little avail, if you do not press forward in your heavenly course. The threatening denounced against backsliding Ephesus lies in full force against you; and you will do well to take heed to it. "I will come unto thee quickly," says Christ, "and will remove thy candlestick, except thou repent." Oh, return from all your backslidings with penitential sorrow and a lively faith; so shall your backslidings be healed; and "so iniquity shall not be your ruin!"]

3. To those who are walking stedfastly in their Christian course—

[Are you under trials? Every day brings you nearer to the termination of them: and your Lord and Saviour is just ready to set the crown of victory upon your head, and to put you into full possession of that better and enduring substance that awaits you. Look up to heaven and see the myriads that are now around the throne. "Whence came they? They all came out of great tribulation, and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. *Therefore* are they before the throne of God[n]." And *therefore* shall you soon join their company, and unite with them in songs of praise to God and to the Lamb for ever. Only "be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life," according to that sure word of promise, "To him that overcometh will I give to sit down with me upon my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father upon his throne." "He is faithful who hath promised, who also will do it" in its appointed time.]

[m] Ps. lxxvii. 11. [n] Rev. vii. 14, 15.

MCXIV.

THE TRUE MEANS OF PERSEVERING TO THE END.

Heb. x. 38, 39. *Now the just shall live by faith: but, if any man*

man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them that draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

TRIALS are the portion of all the people of God: Times and circumstances may occasion a considerable difference as to the measure in which individual believers may be called to endure them: but to all, without exception, it must still be said, as well as to the Hebrews of old, "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye may receive the promise." To all may the same consolation also be administered; namely, that our Lord and Saviour will speedily come to the relief of his afflicted people; and that, if only we believe in him we shall assuredly be saved.

The words in which the Apostle thus consoled the Hebrews, are taken from the prophet Habakkuk; who was himself comforted with this assurance, when bewailing and deprecating the calamities which were about to be brought upon the Jewish nation by their Chaldean enemies[a]. And they are applicable to the Church of God in all ages; since that same almighty Saviour, who promised to interpose in behalf of his believing people then, still engages to be their support in the time of trouble, and only requires that they should look to him with humble and assured confidence, that their trust in him shall not be in vain.

To this consolatory declaration the Apostle adds a most solemn caution, that, if any be turned back from God by means of their trials, it will be to their everlasting perdition.

That the warning may come more distinctly before you, I will endeavour to shew,

I. The way to eternal life—

This is the same in all ages: we must live by faith alone: Whatever our own personal character may have been, we must look to God as "the Author and Giver of all good;" and on him as reconciled to us in the Son of his love, we must rely for a sup-

[a] Hab. i. 6, 12. & ii. 2—4.

a supply of all that we need either for body or for soul, for time or for eternity.

By faith we are first introduced into the Divine life—

[From the manner in which the Apostle quotes this prophecy in other places, it is evident that the sense of it is more large and comprehensive than we should of ourselves have imagined. In the Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians, St. Paul enters fully and argumentatively upon the subject of a sinner's justification before God; and shews, in opposition to all the erroneous notions both of Jews and Gentiles, that it is not by works of any kind, whether ceremonial or moral, but simply and entirely by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In both these Epistles too he not only adduces this prophecy as confirming his doctrine, but he lays a peculiar stress upon it, as establishing his doctrine beyond all contradiction[b] — — —Know ye then, as a matter of primary importance, that, if ever you would live before God, you must come to him as sinners destitute of all help or hope in yourselves, and must cast yourselves entirely upon that Saviour, "whom he has set forth to be a propitiation for sin," and "not for your sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world." There is no other way in which any man can come to God[c]; nor any other name but that of Jesus, whereby any sinner in the universe can be saved[d].]

By faith also we must persevere in it even to the end—

[There is no other way for our continuance in life than that by which we are first brought into a state of spiritual existence. As at the beginning it is said, "He that hath the Son of God hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life[e];" so must it be said even to the end: for "all our fresh springs are in him:" "He is the fountain of life; and in his light alone we can see light." Have we continually fresh sins to be forgiven? There is no way of being cleansed from them but by washing continually in "the fountain which has been once opened for sin and uncleanness[f]." Have we on account of our remaining corruptions continual need of fresh supplies of grace? There is no other source of grace but He: "it hath pleased the Father that in HIM should ALL fulness dwell[g]," and out of his fulness must we all receive, even grace for grace[h]." Are our trials and afflictions multiplied from time to time? It is in his everlasting arms that we must be upheld, and "his grace alone that can be sufficient for us;" In a word, it is "by faith that we must stand"

[b] Rom. i. 17. & Gal. iii. 11. [c] John xiv. 6. [d] Acts iv. 12.
[e] 1 John v. 12. [f] Zech. xiii. 1. [g] Col. i. 19.
[h] John i. 16.

stand" every moment[l]:" "by faith too we must walk[k]:" yea, from first to last, "we must live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us[l]." "As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so we must walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and *established in the faith* as we have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving[m]."]

But in order to maintain our stedfastness in this way, it is necessary we should consider,

II. The danger of departing from it—

On few passages of Scripture do we behold more glaring perversions than in comments upon these words. Some, in order to uphold a favourite system, will deny that the persons here cautioned against apostacy are the same as are spoken of in the preceding and following context. But I intreat you, Brethren, never so to wrest the word of God. Take the word as little children, without inquiring what human system it appears to favour, and let it have all the force which it evidently bears in the passage from whence it is taken: and if you cannot reconcile different parts of God's blessed word, leave that to him, saying, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter." It is plain that every man, whatever his attainments be, has need of this solemn warning: it is evident beyond all contradiction, that many, after having long professed to believe in Christ, and some also of the most distinguished attainments in religion, have gone back, and made shipwreck of their faith: and Paul himself felt a need of exercising continual watchfulness and self-denial, "lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away[n]." Consider then, all of you, the danger of turning back from the good way in which you are now walking:

1. You will inexpressibly grieve and offend your God—

[God says, "My soul shall have no pleasure in you." In the humble and stedfast saint he has great delight; "he taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy[nn]." But if any man leave off to behave himself wisely, how

[l] Rom. xi. 20. [k] 2 Cor. v. 7. [l] Gal. ii. 20.
[m] Col. ii. 6, 7. [n] 1 Cor. ix. 27. [nn] Ps. cxlvii. 11.

how can God take pleasure in him? Whilst walking stedfastly and uprightly before God, the Believer complies with all God's gracious designs, and furthers, to that extent at least, the glory of God's name. But when he draws back from God, he proclaims to all around him, that, in his estimation at least, God is not so worthy to be loved and served as once he had thought him to be; and that, after a full estimate of their respective claims, the world and the flesh are deserving of at least an equal regard with him, if not also a superior regard. Now, I ask, can a *jealous* God look with complacency on such a man? Would even a fellow-creature, when once admitted into the nearest relation to us, be satisfied with such an avowal?

But the words in my text are intended to convey much more than they express: they import that God will look upon such a backslider as an object of his utter abhorrence. This is more plainly declared in the book of Revelation; where the Lord Jesus Christ, addressing the Laodicean Church, says, "I would thou wert cold or hot: but because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth[o]." This shews us the true light in which God views "the backslider in heart;" he lothes and abhors him as a base ungrateful wretch, who has ceased to behave himself wisely, and has "returned, like a dog to his vomit, and like a sow that has been washed to her wallowing in the mire."]

2. You will infallibly destroy your own soul—

[So says my text: they who draw back, "draw back unto perdition." O what a fearful thought! Who can tell all that is implied in the word "perdition?" It is remarkable, that the day of judgment is expressly called, "the day of the perdition of ungodly men[p]:" and so indeed it will prove. *Now* the ungodly have the upper hand, and do what they can to destroy the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world: but *then* the Judge of quick and dead will deal with them, and recompense upon their heads all the evil that they have done. But on none will so severe a doom be inflicted as on those who "have forsaken the right way," and "after having once escaped the pollutions of the world, have been again entangled therein and overcome: with them the latter end will be worse than the beginning[q]."]

Yet, though the danger of falling is such as may well excite in us a holy watchfulness, it need not generate in us a slavish fear: since God engages to uphold the upright in heart: and they are therefore warranted in expecting from him all needful aid.

That

[o] Rev. iii. 15, 16. [p] 2 Pet. iii. 7. [q] 2 Pet. ii. 10, 15, 20, 21.

That we may not unnecessarily make the heart of the righteous sad, we shall endeavour to mark,

III. When our actual progress in the way of life has been such as will warrant a good hope of our continuance in it to the end.

But here we must not take a high standard, since the Apostle's confidence referred not to himself only, but to the great mass of the believing Hebrews throughout the world. If then it be asked, who they are who may hope to persevere in the good way? I answer,

1. Those who are still advancing in the face of difficulties—

[Where there is nothing to try our faith and patience, no conclusions can be drawn respecting the principle of grace that is within us; but, when we are fighting against the world, and the flesh, and the devil, and maintaining the conflict undismayed, we may be sure that God is with us of a truth: and a certainty that "God hath begun a good work within us, is a just ground of confidence, that he will carry it on, and perfect it to the end[r]." God has promised that "he will keep the feet of his saints:" and that "the righteous shall hold on his way, and he who hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." If then we have an evidence within ourselves, that we are indeed endeavouring to approve ourselves to God in a holy and consistent conduct, we need not alarm ourselves about future trials, but may safely and confidently commit the keeping of our souls to God, assured that he will order every thing for us, and that "as our day of trial is, so shall our strength to meet it be."]

2. Those who regard the salvation of their souls as that one object which they are determined at all events to attain—

[If a man have not thoroughly learned that lesson, that his soul is of more value than the whole world, it matters not what his present attainments be; he has no security whatever against a speedy and final apostacy. But, if he be determined in his heart, that, whatever come, he will not barter away his soul, or suffer the salvation of it to be compromised, that man will stand: "he has chosen the good part which shall not be taken away from him." The faith of such an one may be but weak at present; but it shall prevail at last: and because he believes to the *valuing* of his soul, his faith will operate to the *saving* of his soul.

Lower

[r] Phil. i. 6.

Lower than this we cannot go: but thus low we must: for it is not the measure of a man's attainments, so much as the reality of his faith, that we are concerned to inquire after. It is the Lord Jesus Christ alone that can carry on the work effectually in the heart even of the most advanced Christian: and if he see in the least and meanest of his people, that their hearts are upright towards him, "he will carry the lambs in his bosom," and "suffer none to pluck them out of his hands."]

Be persuaded now to BEAR IN MIND,

1. That there is in the mind of God an immense difference between man and man—

[Here we are all together; and the world sees little difference between us: but on some, God looks with pleasure and complacency; and on others, with aversion and abhorrence. Yes, if there be one amongst us that is poor and of a contrite spirit, God says, "To that man will I look." And he will look on him with unutterable delight, insomuch that his very "soul" shall be refreshed with the sight of him. See this poor despised creature, whom man regards as "the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things:" he has a beauty in God's eyes, which makes him lovely beyond all conception: his every word and thought are so dear to God, that he listens to it with delight, and records it in the book of his remembrance, and anticipates with joy the period when he shall have an opportunity of testifying before the whole assembled universe his love for him[s]. No bridegroom ever so rejoiced over his bride, as he does over this creature that is bemoaning his own unworthiness[t]. No monarch conceives himself so enriched by the most splendid diadem, as God does by this acquisition to his family[u]: and he contemplates with inconceivable delight the prospect of securing to himself the everlasting possession of one in whom he takes so deep an interest[x].

But is it thus that he looks on all? Alas! alas! we read of many, whom the world accounts blessed, whom yet "his soul abhors[y]. On them indeed his eye is fixed, as well as on others; but "it is upon them for evil and not for good;" and the only complacency which he feels respecting them is, "Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries: their foot shall slide in due time:" "I will whet my sword, and will make mine arrows drunk with their blood[z]." Think not that God is the same to all; indeed he is not: if to some he is a God of love and mercy, to others "he is a consuming fire." Ah! beloved, when will ye believe this? When will ye realize this thought? When will ye ask, what are God's views of me? what are his thoughts towards me?

Could

[s] Mal. iii. 16—17.
[t] Isai. lxii. 5.
[u] Isai. lxii. 3.
[x] Jer. xxxii. 40, 41.
[y] Ps. x. 3.
[z] Deut. xxxii. 19, 20. 35, 40—42.

Could you but be persuaded to do this, we might yet hope to see you humbled before God, and God's soul delighting in you.]

2. That there is, and will be, a corresponding difference between men in the eternal world—

[Not only of the world at large are there millions "perishing for lack of knowledge," but even of the Church; and of those who once appeared in a hopeful way, are multitudes "drawing back unto perdition." How little do both the one and the other of these imagine what awaits them at the moment of their departure hence! Could they conceive it, how would they now be filled with horror! how would their spirits sink within them! How earnest would they be in their inquiries, What must I do to be saved? Verily they would no longer be so gay, and easy, and secure, as they now are: nor, if we had a just view of their condition, could we speak of them but with floods of tears. Ah! Brethren, when will ye believe that such a thing is *possible?* When will be believe that such a thing is *true?* But true it is, whether ye will believe it or not: I pray God, ye may so believe it on the report of the Gospel, as never to taste it by bitter experience.

But of others there are a goodly number, (Oh! that God would multiply them an hundred fold!) who are "believing in Christ to the saving of their souls." They are already brought out of Egypt, and are pursuing their journey steadily through this dreary wilderness to the promised land. They meet with difficulties; but they are not discouraged: they go on in the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ: and speedily will they attain the great end of their faith, even the everlasting salvation of their souls. O who can estimate aright their prospects? Happy, happy people! How shall we attempt to describe the blessedness that awaits you? What a heaven will burst upon the soul at the first instant of its departure from the body! And what inconceivable bliss will it enjoy in the immediate and everlasting fruition of its God! But I must forbear. In attempting to expatiate on such a subject, I am only darkening counsel by words without knowledge. But do ye, my beloved Brethren, have worthy thoughts of your high calling; and labour night and day to walk worthy of it.

These things may to many appear as a cunningly-devised fable: but know, all of you, that they are the very truth of God; and that, of the multitudes who are now around you, there will soon be many weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, whilst some, who have been plucked as brands out of the burning, will be seated upon thrones of glory, and singing everlasting Hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb.]

3. That

3. That the one great line of distinction between them is "faith"—

[It is by "faith that the just live;" and it is by unbelief that all others are excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Faith is indeed a hidden principle: but it is strongly operative, wherever it exists; and, wherever it operates aright, will assuredly be productive of all the benefits which are here traced to it.

But, notwithstanding all that is said of this principle in the holy Scriptures, and the indispensable necessity of it to the salvation of the soul, how few condemn themselves for their want of it! How few pray to God for it, or are even conscious of their need of it! What greater proof can there be of the blindness with which Satan has blinded the whole world! Men will readily enough acknowledge their need of holiness; but of faith they feel no need: they think they have as much of it as is necessary for their salvation. But, if they would only see how totally inoperative their supposed faith is, they would see at once that they are as destitute of real faith as are even the beasts that perish. Dear Brethren, be aware of this: and cry mightily to God to impart unto you this spiritual gift. It is, in all who have it, the gift of God. No man can produce it in his own heart: it is not a mere conviction founded upon reasoning, but a principle infused into the soul: and it is by that living principle alone can you ever be brought to a state of acceptance with God in this world, and the enjoyment of his favour in the world to come. May God in his mercy create it in all our hearts! and may its fruits within us now be a pledge, and earnest of its yet richer blessings in the realms of glory.]

MCXV.

THE NATURE OF FAITH.

Heb. xi. 1. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen.*

CONSIDERING how much the Scriptures speak of faith, one is surprised that the subject of faith so little occupies the attention of the world at large, or even of the religious world. But the truth is, that the nature of faith is but little known. The world at large consider it as no more than assent upon evidence; whilst the religious world confine their views of it almost exclusively to the office of justifying the soul before God. But faith is of a far more comprehensive

hensive nature than even good men generally suppose. It extends to every thing that has been revealed; and is the one principle that actuates the Christian in every part of the Divine life. From not adverting to this, the description given of faith in our text has been frequently misunderstood. The precise import of the passage will best appear by considering the context. The Apostle is encouraging the believing Hebrews to hold fast their profession. He tells them that faith is the only principle that will enable them to do this: he then proceeds to shew them in a great variety of instances, how faith will act, and how certainly, if duly exercised, it will prevail for the carrying of them forward even to the end.

It is in this general view, and not in the light of justifying the soul, that the Apostle calls it, "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen."

Let us then in this enlarged sense consider,

I. The nature of faith—

Within its proper and legitimate scope is all that God has revealed in his blessed Word—

[Faith comprehends within its grasp the past, the present, and the future. By it, the Christian knows that the universe, but a few thousand years ago, had no existence, and that it was created out of nothing by the word of God. By it, he sees every thing upheld and ordered by the hand that formed it, and not so much as a hair of our head falling to the ground without his special permission. By it, he foresees that all the human race which have in successive ages passed away shall be recalled into existence at the last day, and be judged according to their works.

But more particularly faith views that great mysterious work the work of Redemption. It beholds the plan formed in the eternal councils of the Father and of the Son; and in due season with gradually increasing light revealed to man. It sees the incarnation, the death, the resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the sending forth of the Holy Spirit in all his miraculous and new-creating powers, to attest that the work was finished, and to render it effectual for the salvation of a ruined world. This work it still beholds carrying on in heaven by the Lord Jesus as our great High Priest within the veil, and as the living and life-giving Head of his Church and people. And, carrying its eye forward to future ages, it sees the Redeemer's kingdom

dom universally established, and every subject of his empire seated with him upon his throne of glory.

All intermediate matters it beholds fulfilled in their season, and is assured, that, of every thing that God has spoken, not one jot or title shall ever fall to the ground.]

Of all this it brings *a full conviction to the mind*, and, as far as it can be desired, *a full experience to the soul*—

[Faith is "the evidence of things not seen." By "evidence" is meant *such a proof as silences all objections*. Of the past, the present, or the future, what could reason declare? Nothing with any certainty. Of the mystery of Redemption more especially, it could determine nothing. With our bodily senses we could ascertain nothing. Every thing is apprehended by faith only. Yet is it therefore uncertain? No: it is as clear to the mind of a Believer, as if it had been demonstrated to his reason, or subjected to his sight. Having assured himself from reason, that the Scriptures are the word of God, and that the great mystery of redemption, as apprehended by him, is revealed in them, he has no doubt concerning it: his fall in Adam; his recovery by Christ; his restoration to the Divine Image through the influences of the Holy Spirit; these things appear so worthy of God, and so suitable to man, that no doubt respecting them exists in the mind: and all the objections which pride and ignorance have raised against them are scattered like mists before the rising sun.

[But it is not only *as true* that faith presents these things to the mind, but *as good*, as *desirable*, and as *promised*: and it so apprehends them, as to give them *an actual subsistence in the soul*: it is "the substance of things hoped for." These things, as far as they are good, and future, are the objects of hope; and therefore, as we might suppose, unpossessed. But, though future, they are made present by the exercise of faith; and, though only hoped for, are actually enjoyed. This is a wonderful property of faith. Consolations, victories, triumphs, glory, though remote in ultimate experience, are by anticipation rendered present, so that the first-fruits, the pledge, the earnest, the foretaste are in actual possession; and whilst the grapes of Eshcol assure the soul of the final possession of its inheritance, the views of Pisgah transport it thither, and enable it to realize its most enlarged hopes and expectations.]

From this description of faith we may see,

II. Its aspect on the welfare and stability of the soul—

As entering into every part of the Divine life, its influence might be pointed out in an almost infinite variety

variety of particulars. But we will content ourselves with specifying two, which will, to a certain degree, give an insight into all:

1. It renders us indifferent to all the concerns of time and sense—

[Whilst we are in the body we cannot be *absolutely* indifferent to earthly things; but *comparatively* we may. The Unbeliever has respect to nothing else: he sees nothing, knows nothing, cares for nothing, but what is visible and temporal. He is "of the flesh," and "savours only the things of the flesh." His hopes, his fears, his joys, his sorrows, are altogether carnal. So it once was with the Believer: but it is now so no longer. By faith he now views other things, which fully occupy his mind, and engage all the powers of his soul. Earthly vanities once appeared as grand and glorious as the starry heavens. But they are fled from his sight: they are all eclipsed by the splendor of the sun of righteousness which has arisen upon his soul. There indeed they are; and were the light of God's truth withdrawn from his soul, they would again resume a measure of their former importance. But they are now reduced to insignificance: and the things which "once appeared glorious in his eyes, have now no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth." Ignorant persons are ready to impute the Believer's withdrawment from the world to superstition, to moroseness, to pride, to enthusiasm, to gloom and melancholy. But he renounces the world as an empty vanity, and an ensnaring "lie," that deceives all who follow it, and ruins all who trust in it. Once "a deceived heart had turned him aside, so that he could not deliver his soul, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" but now he knows, that what he formerly grasped, was a mere shadow; and that there is nothing substantial but what is apprehended by faith. Hence "What was once gain to him, is now accounted loss; yea all things are now but as dung, that he may win Christ, and be found in him." Such are now his views of the cross of Christ, and of the glory that shall be revealed, that "the world is crucified to him, and he is crucified unto the world[a]."]

2. It strengthens us both for action and for suffering in the service of our God—

[Before that faith has brought a man to a view of the things which are invisible and eternal, he has no zeal for God, no fortitude to suffer shame for the sake of Christ. But when once the realities of the eternal world are open to his view; when once heaven with all its glory, and hell with all its terrors, are apprehended by him; Who shall stop *him?* Who shall intimidate *him?*

[a] Gal. vi. 14.

him? Who shall persuade *him?* Bid him relax his diligence, and give way to carnal ease and pleasure; he will say, 'Go, offer your advice to one that is running in a race, or fighting for his life: will *he* listen to you? expect not *me* then to listen, who am running for eternity, and fighting for my soul.' Is he called to suffer? He knows for whose sake it is that he is called to take up his cross; and he takes it up with cheerfulness, and "rejoices that he is counted worthy to bear it." Has he made considerable advance in the ways of God? He does not on that account relax; but "forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to that which is before, he presses on towards the mark for the prize of his high calling of God in Christ Jesus[b]." These are the things which are chiefly insisted on throughout the whole of this chapter: and, as such were the operations of faith in the days of old, such also they are at this hour; and such will they be to the very end of time.]

SEE you not then, Beloved,

1. How little there is of true faith in the world?

[If you will believe the report which men give of themselves, there is no want of faith at all. Every one who calls himself a Christian, considers it as a matter of course that he possesses faith. But how would faith operate under other circumstances? Let a man believe that a house in which he is sitting is on fire; or that a vessel in which he his embarked is ready to sink; will he not evince the truth of his faith by some efforts to escape? But here men profess to believe all that God has spoken about the danger of their souls, and the way opened for their deliverance, and yet are as unconcerned about either the one or the other as the beasts that perish. Alas! how fearfully do they deceive their own souls!

But even in the religious world there is an awful want of faith. For how little are men actuated by the truths which they profess to believe! How strong is the hold which earthly things yet retain of the Believer's soul, and how faint are his impressions of eternity! ——— Well might our Lord say, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth[c]? Know ye, Brethren, that "if you had faith but as a grain of mustard-seed, it should remove mountains:" and, consequently, you may judge of the smallness of your faith by the slender effects which it has produced upon your souls. Pray ye then to him who alone can give you faith; "Lord, help my unbelief;" Lord, "increase my faith."]

2. In what way alone you can hope to vanquish all your spiritual enemies?

[It

[b] Phil. iii. 13, 14. [c] Luke xviii. 8.

[It is "by faith that you are to walk, and not by sight." In order to form a correct judgment of things, listen not to the report of sense, but consult the testimony of faith. Send faith as a spy to search out the heavenly land that is before you. If you attend to the voice of unbelief, it will tell you of nothing but Anakims that are invincible, and "of cities that are walled up to heaven." But if you ask for the account which faith will give, it will tell you, "They are bread for us[d]," and shall be as easily devoured, and as profitably to our souls, as the food that is put into our mouths. What the effect of this principle shall be upon your souls, you may see in the case of the apostle Paul. Greater trials than his you cannot expect to encounter: and greater supports you cannot need. But whence arose his supports? He was animated by "*a spirit of faith*:" by that, he foresaw the issue of his conflicts: and, by that, he was upheld: and, through the influence of that, all his afflictions appeared but light and momentary, yea, and the very means of augmenting his happiness and glory[e]. — — — Thus shall faith operate in you: it shall "work by love;" it shall "purify the heart;" it shall "overcome the world[f]." Only "live by faith:" and if at any time you be ready to stagger through unbelief, remember that "he is faithful who hath promised;" and "be strong in faith, giving glory to God." For of this you may be perfectly assured, that the more lively your faith is, the more abundant will be its fruits; and that in every hour of trial "according to your faith it will be done unto you."]

[d] Numb. xiv. 9. [e] 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9, 13—18. [f] 1 John v. 4.

MCXVI.

ABEL'S OFFERING INSTRUCTIVE TO US.

Heb. xi. 4. *By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it, he being dead, yet speaketh.*

IN reading the history of the saints under the Old Testament dispensation, we are constrained to admire their conduct on many occasions, and to regard them as excellent patterns for our imitation. But we should not readily have traced all their diversified excellencies to one principle, and still less to the principle of *faith*, if it had not been done for us by an inspired Writer. But, now that it is done, we see the truth, and the importance too, of the suggestion;

tion; and are stirred up to cultivate the same principle in order to the attainment of their virtues.

The Apostle, in adducing instances of the power of faith from the beginning of the world to the close of the Jewish records, omits all mention of Adam, who, we doubt not, both lived and died in faith. But his aim in this part of his Epistle is to encourage the believing Hebrews to persevere in their holy profession, notwithstanding all the trials to which they might be subjected on account of it: and, as nothing particular is recorded concerning Adam's faith, and Abel was a martyr for the faith, it was more to his purpose to commence his catalogue of worthies with the name of Abel; of whose offering we are now more particularly called to speak. To illustrate what the Apostle says concerning it, I shall shew,

I. In what consisted the peculiar excellence of Abel's offering as contrasted with that of Cain—

By referring to the account given us in the book of Genesis, we find,

1. That Abel's offering differed widely from that of Cain—

[Cain brought only "of the fruits of the ground[a]." Now this he might have done even in Paradise; since it was only *a tribute of gratitude* towards his heavenly Benefactor, and *an acknowledgement of dependence* on him for a continuance of his favours. But Abel brought "of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat[b];" by which he acknowledged himself a sinner deserving of death, and his hope of mercy only through the intervention of a vicarious sacrifice. By this act, he professed his faith in that Saviour who was in due time to die for the sins of the whole world, and whom the sacrificial ordinances already instituted were intended to prefigure. That sacrifices had been ordained of God, is evident, from its being said that Abel offered his sacrifice "by *faith:*" for had Abel offered this sacrifice of his own mind, there could have been no scope for the exercise of faith; since faith necessarily has respect to some divine declaration; and in this instance must have had respect to *a command* from God to present such an offering, and *a promise* from God to accept it. When the command was first given, we are not certainly informed: but I conceive it to have been immediately after the Fall, when, as we are told, "the Lord God made coats of skins, to clothe" our First Parents,

[a] Gen. iv. 3. [b] ib. ver. 4.

Parents[c]. It is evident that living creatures were then slain; and slain by God's command: and, if we suppose those living creatures then offered in sacrifice, we have the most complete exhibition of the way of salvation that is contained in all the Sacred Records: since, as the sin of our First Parents was atoned for by the blood of those sacrifices, and the shame of their nakedness was covered by their skins, so are our sins expiated by the blood of our great Sacrifice, and our souls are clothed in the robe of his unspotted righteousness. At all events the fact is clear, that such an institution had been formed by God; else Abel's faith could not have had respect to it: and no other period for the commencement of it seems so proper as that to which we have referred, because it is the only period mentioned in the Inspired History, and because, if not instituted till the time of Abel, our First Parents must have been left many years without that instruction and consolation which such an ordinance was calculated to convey.

It is evident then that Abel's offering excelled that of Cain in two most important respects, namely, *in the matter of it*, and *in the disposition with which it was offered:* his being "a firstling of his flock," whilst Cain's was only "of the fruits of the ground;" and being offered with an express view to the sacrifice which was in due time to be offered, whilst Cain had no respect whatever to himself as needing salvation, or to the Saviour by whom alone he could find acceptance with God.]

2. That God had respect to Abel's offering, and not to Cain's—

[In what way God testified his acceptance of Abel's offering we are not informed: we are sure however that it was in some way clearly understood by Abel, and as clearly by Cain also; since it was the means of filling him with envy and wrathful indignation. It is probable, that God sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice of Abel. This in after ages was frequently done by God; as at the first offering of sacrifices by Aaron in the tabernacle[d], and at the first offering of sacrifices also in the temple of Solomon[e]. Whatever the testimony was, God shewed, by it, that he accepted both the person and the offering of Abel, whilst neither the person nor the offering of Cain were at all acceptable in his sight[f].]

Such being the acknowledged superiority of Abel's sacrifice, let us consider,

II. What instruction the pre-eminent acceptance of it conveys to us—

We are told that "by it, he being dead, yet speaketh." The whole record concerning it shews,

1. That

[c] Gen. iii. 21. [d] Lev. ix. 24. [e] 2 Chron. vii. 1. [f] Gen. iv. 4, 5.

1. That man, how righteous soever he may be, needs a sacrifice—

[Abel is characterized by our blessed Lord himself as eminently righteous; being designated by the name "righteous Abel[g]." And in our text it is said, that "God bore testimony to him as a righteous man." But did he on account of his distinguished piety not need an atonement? or did he think himself entitled to approach his God in any other way than as a self-ruined sinner, that could be saved only through the blood of a vicarious sacrifice? No: it is remarkable that Cain, who was at heart a murderer, thought he might find acceptance with God without such a sacrifice; whilst "righteous Abel" dared not to hope for mercy in any other way than through the sacrifice of Christ: and at this very hour none more deride the necessity of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in his atoning blood, than those who are hostile in their hearts to all vital godliness. But, however moral any may have been, they are sinners before God, and must seek for mercy solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ: for an Apostle expressly tells us, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins[h]." Let this then be remembered by us all: for it is by no means so deeply considered as it ought: there lurks in all of us a self-righteous disposition: we, no less than the Jews of old, are averse to "submit to the righteousness of God," and make the Lord Jesus Christ "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence." But there is "no way to the Father but by him[i], nor any name under heaven but his whereby any man can be saved[k]."]

2. That a sacrifice has been appointed of God for the sins of the whole world—

[It has been before shewn, that Abel's "faith" necessarily pre-supposes a divine institution as the object of his faith. And what was the sacrifice that was ordained of God? Was it to the blood of bulls or goats that men were taught to look? "The blood of bulls and of goats," as the Apostle tells us, "could never take away sins." That same person who was foretold to Adam as "the Seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head," was to effect that victory by having his own heel first bruised[l], or, as Saint Paul expresses it, he was "through death to destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil[m]:" in a word, he was to "redeem us to God by his blood," and to be the propitiation not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world. He it was who, both in Abel's sacrifice, and in all the sacrifices under the law, was shadowed forth; and who is therefore called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

[g] Matt. xxiii. 35. [h] Heb. ix. 22. [i] John xiv. 6.
[k] Acts. iv. 12. [l] Gen. iii. 15. [m] Heb. ii. 14.

world[n]." Before he came into the world, his sacrifice had a retrospective, as at the time of its being offered it had a prospective, efficacy, for the salvation of all who trusted in it, so that, from the beginning to the end of time, he is the only Saviour of sinful man.]

3. That through that sacrifice all who believe in it shall assuredly be saved—

[We are told that the record concerning Abraham's having his faith imputed to him for righteousness, "was *not written for his sake alone*, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead[o]." And we may be perfectly sure, that the record concerning the efficacy of Abel's faith, and the testimony given to him from God respecting the acceptableness of his sacrifice, was not for his honour merely, but for our encouragement. It shews to us how pleasing in God's sight the humble Publican is in comparison of the self-applauding Pharisee, especially when he rests all his hopes of mercy on the atoning blood of Christ. It shews us, that God "will fill the hungry with good things, whilst the rich he will send empty away." In a word, it shews us, that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin;" that "whosoever cometh unto God by him shall in no wise be cast out;" and that "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things." Thus, whilst it directs us to the blood of Christ as the ground of our hope, it assures us, that that "blood speaketh not only as much and as satisfactorily as the blood of Abel did, but far better things than that ever did or could speak[p]."]

There is one thing not yet noticed in our text, which deserves particular attention, and which will serve us for an APPLICATION of the subject to our souls—

"By his faith," and the consequent acceptance of his sacrifice, "Abel, though dead, yet speaketh to us."

HEAR THEN ABEL AS NOW SPEAKING TO YOU FROM THE DEAD.

['Brethren, though dead, I yet live; and though I have 'been dead almost six thousand years, I would speak to you as 'though I had died but yesterday. I am concerned that you 'should profit by my experience. You are all assembled to 'worship and serve your God: and you are ready to conceive, 'that on that account you are all rendering unto God an acceptable service. But I must declare to you that this is far from 'being

[n] Rev. xiii. 8. [o] Rom. iv. 23, 24. [p] Heb. xii. 24.

'being the case. Your outward forms, considered indepen-
'dently of the frame of mind in which you engage in them, are
'of no value in the sight of God. You may "kill an ox in
'sacrifice, and be only as if you slew a man: you may sacrifice
'a lamb, and be as if you cut off a dog's neck: you may offer
'an oblation, and be as if you offered swine's blood: you may
'burn incense, and be no more accepted, than if you blessed
'an idol[q]." God looks not at the *act*, but at the *heart*: and if
'that be not right with him, your sacrifices, how costly soever
'they may be, are only "an abomination to him[r]." Of all
'this you may be assured from what is related concerning my
'brother Cain and myself. He, as you have been told, was
'not accepted, whilst I was accepted. What was it that made
'the difference? Why did God look on me with complacency,
'and with abhorrence on him? It was because I approached
'him as a sinner, whose hopes were founded solely on the sacri-
'fice of his Son, whilst my Brother approached him without
'any such exercise of repentance and faith. And so it is with
'you. On those who draw nigh to him with a broken and con-
'trite spirit, and with their eyes fixed on the Lamb of God to
'take away their sins, he looks with delight: he will even give
'to them sweet tokens of his acceptance, and testimonies of his
'love: and, if he do not give the same *visible* demonstrations
'of his love to them, as he did to me, he will not leave them
'without witness even in the minds of their enemies: for he
'will so enrich their souls by his grace, as shall make it evident,
'that God is with them of a truth. But on the proud self-
righteous formalist he will look with scorn and indignation.
'Yes, to those of you who have come up hither merely to per-
'form a duty which custom has prescribed, he says, "Ye hypo-
'crites, in vain do ye worship me, seeing that, whilst you draw
'nigh to me with your mouths, and honour me with your lips,
'your hearts are far from me[s]." I warn you then not to de-
'ceive your own souls: for assuredly, whether ye will believe it
'or not, God will ere long make the same distinction between
'you that he did between me and Cain: the contrite and be-
'lieving worshippers shall have a testimony of his approbation
'before the whole assembled universe; but the impenitent and
'unbelieving shall be marked out as monuments of his everlast-
'ing displeasure. As for you who worship him in faith, he may
'for the present leave you in the hands of the ungodly, who
'from envy may be incensed against you; He may even suffer
'your "greatest enemies to be those of your own household;"
'yea, he may leave you even to be put to death, and to suffer
'martyrdom for your fidelity to him. But let not that deter
'you from confessing him openly before men. I have never
'regretted

[q] Isai. lxvi. 3. [r] Prov. xxi. 27. [s] Matt. xv. 7—9.

'regretted the sufferings I endured for him; nor will you ever 'regret any thing which you may be called to sustain. Even 'the testimony which you shall now enjoy in your own con-'science, shall be an ample recompence for all: what then shall 'that testimony in the day of judgment be, when he shall say, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy 'of your Lord?" Go on then without fear, and "hold fast 'the profession of your faith without wavering." "Be faithful 'unto death; and he will give you a crown of life[t]."

Such we may well conceive to be the strains in which Abel would now address you: And I pray God that they may sink down into our ears, and produce a saving effect upon our souls. Are there any here who are "going in the way of Cain[u]," and "hating those who are more righteous than themselves[x]?" Ah! think what misery attaches to such a state of mind both in this world and the next. Even here, as God has said, "there is no peace to the wicked; but they are like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt[y]:" and what will they be hereafter? What does Cain now think of that piety that he despised, and of that enmity with which he persecuted it even unto death? Now he knows who was right: and so will ye ere long, whether ye will now learn it or not. But Oh! stop ere it be too late: and have recourse to that sacrifice which will avail for all who trust in it. And ye who are suffering for righteousness' sake, "marvel not as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Abel's, and of Christ's, sufferings also, that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy[z]."]

[t] Rev. ii. 10. If this be the subject of *a Funeral Sermon*, it may be proper here to shew what the deceased person *did* say, or *would* say.

[u] Jude 11. [x] 1 John iii. 11, 12. [y] Isai. lvii. 20, 21.
[z] 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.

MCXVII.

NOAH'S FAITH.

Heb. xi. 7. *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*

OF all the principles which operate in the Christian's mind, faith is the most distinguished. In some respects indeed love claims a preference, because it is

is the very image of the Deity[a], and will exist when faith and hope shall be no more[b]. But as faith is that grace which most of all honours God, so it is that which God most delights to honour. On many occasions wherein a bright assemblage of graces shone forth, our blessed Lord overlooked all others, and commended the faith[c]. The chapter before us recounts the exercises of faith in the most eminent saints from the beginning of the world to the days of the Apostles. We shall call your attention at present to the faith of Noah; and,

I. Illustrate it—

The different things here spoken respecting it require us to notice—

1. Its operations—

He credited the "Divine warning"—

[God had declared to him his intention to destroy the world by a deluge. And how did he receive the warning? Did he indulge vain reasonings about the practicability of such an event; or pretend to be more merciful than God? No. Though there was not the remotest appearance of such a thing, he believed it would certainly take place: and though to proud reason it seemed hard that all living creatures, old and young, men and beasts, should be involved in one undiscriminating ruin, yet he doubted not but that it should be as God had said; and was persuaded that "the Judge of all the earth would do right."].

He was "moved with fear" on account of it—

[He had nothing to fear respecting his eternal state, because he was a perfect and upright man, and walked in holy fellowship with his God. But God was incensed by the wickedness of his creatures, insomuch that "he repented he had made them:" and he determined to pour out his fury upon them to the uttermost. Did it not then become Noah, as well as others, to fear and tremble? Did it become him to be so absorbed in selfishness as to be unconcerned about the destruction, the sudden, and perhaps everlasting, destruction, of all the human race? Indeed a dread of the Divine judgments was necessary, to stir him up to use the proper means for his own safety: and it was an unequivocal proof of his crediting the declarations of God concerning them.]

He

[a] 1 John iv. 8. [b] 1 Cor. xiii. 13.
[c] Matt. viii. 10. & xv. 28. Mark x. 52. Luke vii. 50.

He exerted himself in God's appointed way—

[God commanded him to construct a vessel of an immense size, and such an one as had not been seen from the foundation of the world[d]. The expense of building it must be exceeding great, so as to swallow up all his fortune. The time it would occupy would be many years; during all of which the people would be scoffing at him as a deluded visionary, and taking occasion from the very forbearance of God to load him with grosser insults[e]. But he regarded not any labour, any odium, any sacrifice in the path of duty: he was intent only on executing the Divine mandate, and on providing for the security of those who should believe his testimony.]

2. Its effects and consequences—

He "condemned the world"—

[During the hundred and twenty years that he was engaged in building the ark, he preached to the world with much earnestness and fidelity: and therefore doubtless condemned them often in his discourses. But he condemned them yet more by his example. His faith condemned their unbelief; his fear, their security; his obedience, their disobedience. If he had not spoken one word with his lips, his constructing the ark would have been a tacit, but keen, and continual reproof to all around him.]

He "saved his family"—

[At the appointed time the flood came. The world, notwithstanding all the warnings given them, were as far as ever from expecting the event[f]. It is probable that their contempt of Noah's superstition and folly (as they would call it) had risen to its height, when they saw this immense vessel built, and filled with all different kinds of animals, and provisioned for many months; and Noah with his little family inclosed in it, before the smallest symptom of any inundation had appeared. But in the midst of their revels the flood came and swept them all away: and Noah only, with his family, were preserved. That his family owed their preservation to *him* is clear; not only because it was ascribed to the exercise of *his* faith, but because one at least of them was as deserving of God's wrath as the generality of those who perished.]

He "became an heir of righteousness"—

[Noah knew that the whole of that mysterious dispensation was typical of the salvation which is given us in Christ Jesus[g]. He saw that a more terrible deluge was about to overwhelm an ungodly world: and that Christ was the ark which God had prepared for

[d] It was above 160 yards long, 27 broad, and 16 high.
[e] 2 Pet. iii. 4. [f] Matt. xxiv. 38, 39. [g] 1 Pet. iii. 20, 21.

for us. Into that ark he entered by faith: and thus, being "found *in* him[h]," and "preserved *in* him[i]," he "became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith;" or, in other words, he was accepted, justified, and saved through the Saviour's merits.]

While we call you to admire the faith of Noah, we would also,

II. Commend it to your imitation—

Our circumstances being wholly different from his, there must be many particulars in his faith which we cannot imitate, but the substantial parts of it are imitable by all.

1. Believe God's testimony respecting the judgments which he will bring upon the world—

[There are great and terrible judgments denounced against the ungodly, yea, "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men[k]" — — — Nor shall gross wickedness only be the object of God's wrath: a state of unregeneracy, whether attended with more or less open sin, will certainly involve us in the general doom[l]: nor shall one of all the human race, at least not one to whom the Gospel has been preached, escape, unless he get into the ark prepared for him[m].

Now do not presume to dispute against this. Do not, because there is no appearance at present of such calamities, imagine that they shall never come. Do not pretend to be more merciful than God, and to say, God will never execute such tremendous judgments: for "he has said, and he will do it; he has spoken, and he will make it good." It may appear as improbable as the deluge; but, however improbable it may appear, it shall come to pass; and all who will not believe it now, shall experience the truth of it to their cost.]

2. Use the means of safety which God has appointed—

[You have not to build an ark: there is one constructed and provisioned by God himself; and the door is open for you to enter in. Do not absurdly ask, "How can *that* vessel save me?" neither attempt to form another for yourself: nor flee to this or that mountain for safety: but go to Christ: seek an interest in him by faith: commit yourself wholly and cheerfully to him: and then you may defy all the storms and billows that menace your destruction. Moreover, delay not to place yourself beyond

[h] Phil. iii. 9. [i] Jude 1. [k] Ps. ix. 17. & xi. 6. & Rom. i. 18.
[l] John iii. 3. [m] Acts iv. 12.

beyond the reach of danger; because, while you are loitering, "the door may be shut," and all entrance into it may be barred for ever[n]. It is not at all improbable that many who had derided Noah, or perhaps assisted in constructing the ark, clung to it when the floods came; and cried to Noah, "Open to us, and take us in:" and doubtless, if that were the case, Noah would pity their deplorable condition when he heard their cries or saw their unavailing endeavours. But God had shut the door; and Noah was not at liberty to open it: so that, one after another, they all "sank like lead in the mighty waters." Thus many in the last day will say, "Lord, Lord, open to us;" or "they will cry to the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb[o]:" but the judgments they once despised, will come upon them irresistibly, and for ever. Cultivate then a holy fear; and enter into the ark while it continues open to you.]

3. Suffer nothing to divert you from your purpose—

[We have said that Noah incurred much odium as well as much expense in this exercise of faith. And it is certain, that you also will be called to make some sacrifices for your God. Not your reputation only, but your interests also, may be materially affected by your obedience to Christ. But what did Noah lose in the issue? What concern did he feel either about the reflections cast on him, or the labour and money he had bestowed, when he found himself safe in the ark, and saw the whole world perishing in the waters? Still less will ye feel, when we shall see the floods of Divine vengeance deluging the ungodly, and yourselves, as "heirs of righteousness," placed beyond the reach of harm. Fear not then to be singular in a good cause. It is better to condemn the world by a holy singularity, and to be condemned *by* them on account of it, than to be condemned *with* them, and endure the wrath of an incensed God.]

[n] Matt. xxv. 10—12. [o] Rev. vi. 16.

MCXVIII.

ABRAHAM'S LIFE A PATTERN FOR OURS.

Heb. xi. 8—10. *By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs*

heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

THERE can scarcely be proposed to our consideration any subject more important than the practical efficacy of faith. It is the one subject which pervades this whole chapter: and it is set before us in the most advantageous way that can be imagined, being exhibited in living examples, in whom it was so embodied, as to be visible, as it were, before our eyes. Had the Apostle launched forth into a general description of it, we might possibly be thought to lay an undue stress on any expressions which he has used: but, when he merely refers us to historic fact as illustrative of the point, we feel, that there is no room for misapprehension on the part of any candid inquirer.

The Apostle has already adduced instances which occurred before the flood: and now he comes to specify others which took place at different and distant periods, almost to the Apostolic age. At the head of these is the case of Abraham, who, both in this chapter, and in other parts of Scripture, is more celebrated for his faith than any other of the children of men. We propose to consider,

I. His conduct under the influence of faith—

It is but a partial view that we shall be led to take at present of Abraham's faith, because other, and yet more remarkable, circumstances will come under our consideration at a future time. We now notice only two things:

1. His departure from his own country—

[Whilst Abraham was in Ur of the Chaldees, God appeared to him, and said, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land which I will shew thee[a]." Whether this was done in a vision, or by a voice, we are not informed: but it is clear that it was done in such a way as not to leave the smallest doubt upon Abraham's mind, that the command proceeded from Jehovah, the only true and living God. It was a command which required much self-denial: for every man naturally feels attached to his country, and his kindred,

[a] Gen. xii. 1. and Acts. vii. 3.

kindred, and his possessions; and, unless induced by the prospect of some great advantages, is averse to leave them. But the self-denial was the greater, because he was not informed whither he was to go: it was to a land which should afterwards be shewn him. What would all his friends and relatives think of him, when he told them that he was about to forsake them all, and did not so much as know whither he was going? Would they not account him mad? Yet did he obey, without hesitation, and without a murmur. God, at the same time that he issued this command, had engaged to "make of him a great nation," and to raise up from his loins the promised "Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed[b]:" and of God's power or fidelity he had no doubt[c]: he therefore went forth, willingly renouncing all present comforts in obedience to his God, assured that, however despised or ridiculed his conduct might be, it would prove in the issue to be the path of happiness and wisdom.]

2. His sojourning in the land of promise as in a strange country—

[When he went forth from his own country, he took with him Sarah his wife, and Terah his father, and his nephew Lot. But though he went towards Canaan, he stopped short of it in Haran; and there abode five years, till his father's death: when he proceeded to Canaan[d], where, except when driven from it by a famine, he abode during the remainder of his days. But did he then merely change one inheritance for another? No: he had not there the smallest inheritance, "no, not so much as to set his foot on." He had not even a stationary abode; but dwelt in tents, which were moved from one place to another, as occasion required: thus avowing himself to be a mere pilgrim and sojourner there, and to be "looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." The city which he had left in his native land, and those which were in the land of promise, had their foundation in the dust, to which they would all in time be reduced: but the heavenly city, which God had formed for his own habitation and the eternal residence of his saints, would continue for ever: and to that he looked as his home; content to have no abiding place here, if only he might attain to that as his eternal rest[e]. Nor was it for himself only that he chose this unsettled mode of life, but for his children also, even for "Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise:" for what he desired for himself, he desired for them also, the enjoyment of the Divine favour, and the possession of an unseen, but everlasting inheritance.]

But whilst we contemplate his conduct in these respects, it will be proper to shew,

II. How

[b] Gen. xii. 2, 3.
[c] Rom. iv. 18—21.
[d] Acts. vii. 4.
[e] Heb. xiii. 14.

II. How far his example is a pattern for us—

It is evident, that the whole catalogue of saints here enumerated is intended to illustrate the nature and efficacy of faith. Yet in considering the conduct of the individuals, we must make due allowance for the difference of circumstances, and rather mark the principle by which they were actuated, than the particular acts in which it was displayed. If, for instance, we should imagine that we were called to forsake our country and kindred in the way that Abraham did, we should greatly err. But I conceive, that, in the two following respects, all will confess we are bound to follow him:

1. The authority of God should in our minds be paramount to every other authority—

[As he "consulted not with flesh and blood," when once the Divine will was intimated to him, so neither should we: it should be sufficient for us that God hath commanded any thing: there should then be no inquiry whether the command be easy or not; nor should there be any regard to consequences in obeying it: there should be in us a fixed determination of heart to fulfil his will at all events. If, for instance, the Lord Jesus Christ say to us, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me;" we must not stand to inquire into the extent of the self-denial that may be requisite, or the weight of the cross which we may have to bear, but leave that to his wise and gracious disposal, being intent on nothing but the performance of our duty to him. If he add, that we must "forsake all, and follow him," not only not loving, but actually hating, *in comparison of him*, our own nearest and most honoured relatives, yea, and "our own lives also," we must not reply, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" but must set ourselves instantly to fulfil in all its extent whatever he has required of us. If men, who know not God, despise, and revile, and persecute us, we must be ready to welcome it all for his sake; and to reply to the menaces of the most ferocious adversaries, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." In a word, we must spare no pains to ascertain the mind of God; and, that once learned, neither men nor devils should deter us from labouring to fulfil it.]

2. The interests of the eternal world should be paramount to every other interest—

[Abraham had never seen the heavenly city; but, in the hope of reaching it, he counted all earthly possessions, interests,

or

or pleasures, as unworthy of notice. We too are ignorant of what awaits us in the eternal world: we have no conception of the glory that shall be revealed to us at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But by faith we may even now get such views of it, that all earthly glory shall vanish before it, as the stars before the meridian sun. How empty did all the glory of Egypt appear to Moses, when he had respect unto the recompence of reward which awaited him in a better world[f]! And to St. Paul all his accumulated afflictions appeared lightness itself, whilst he looked, not at "the things which are visible and temporal, but at those which are invisible and eternal[g]." And thus it will be with us: it will be a small thing to us that we have no inheritance here, or even that we are called to give up an inheritance we already possess. We shall even "take joyfully the spoiling of our goods, knowing that we have in heaven a better, and an enduring, substance[h]." We shall contentedly live as pilgrims and sojourners here, and seek our rest only in the world above.]

Let us then take occasion from this subject to inquire,

1. Whether we be children of Abraham—

[Our blessed Lord has told us, that, "if we be Abraham's children, we shall do the works of Abraham[i]." Do we then *these* works? Do we in these respects walk in the steps of Abraham[k]?" Inquire what authority has God's word with you? Do you set yourselves to obey every command of his as soon as you know it? and are you anxious to know his will in order that you may obey it? Inquire also, what influence the world has over you? If you belong to Christ, though you are *in* the world, you are not *of* it: "you are not *of* the world, even as Christ was not of the world[l]:" you love it not, nor any thing that is in it: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, are shunned by you as ensnaring, and despised by you as unsatisfying[m]." "The very friendship of it you avoid, as enmity with God[n]:" you "come out from it[o];" and will "not be conformed to it[p]:" you are even "crucified unto it, and esteem it as a crucified" object in your eyes[q]. Say, is it thus with you? and do you regard it thus in reference to your children, as well as unto yourself; contented that your children after you should live in tents, if only they may attain an everlasting inheritance? The description of all true Christians is, "They walk by faith, and not by sight[r]." And surely it is no difficult thing to ascertain what your habits are in this respect. Oh! remember, that

[f] ver. 26. [g] 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. [h] Heb. x. 34.
[i] John viii. 39. [k] Rom. iv. 12. [l] John xvii. 14—16.
[m] 1 John ii. 15, 16. [n] James iv. 4. [o] 2 Cor. vi. 17.
[p] Rom. xii. 2. [q] Gal. vi. 14. [r] 2 Cor. v. 7.

that if you are not Abraham's, you have another father, even the devil. This may sound harsh; but it is the declaration of him who "spake as never man spake[s]." I pray you, leave not such an interesting subject any longer in suspense: nor rest till you have given evidence that you are "Abraham's seed," by walking as Abraham "walked, and as Christ himself also walked[t]."]

2. How you may become so—

[It was by faith that Abraham was brought into a justified state: and by faith are we also to be made partakers of that happiness. By our works we must *prove* our relation to him; but by faith only can we *obtain* an admission into his family. We must believe in the promised Seed, as he did; and then shall we be Christ's, as he was: "And, if we be Christ's, then are we Abraham's Seed, and heirs according to the promise[u]." Now it is of the utmost importance that we understand this matter well. For there are many who imagine, that to sequester themselves from the world is meritorious, and to live as monks or hermits is to secure the favour of their God. But this is a fatal error. There is no acceptance with God but by Jesus Christ, even by faith in his atoning blood. The Apostle especially guards us on this head. Abraham was circumcised: yet his righteousness came not by circumcision, but by the faith which he had whilst he was yet uncircumcised[x]. So it is not by any obedience of ours that we are to purchase an inheritance in heaven; we must receive it as the free gift of God through Christ Jesus; and then press forward towards it in the way of his commandments. Let us walk with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in this world, and then we shall "sit down with them for ever in the kingdom of our God."]

[s] John viii. 38—44. [t] 1 John ii. 6.
[u] Gal. iii. 6, 7, 29. [x] Rom. iv. 9—11.

MCXIX.

THE PRACTICAL EFFICACY OF FAITH.

Heb. xi. 13. *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

THE precepts contained in Scripture may be supposed to admit of a latitude of interpretation favourable to the views of those who profess to regard them; but the examples that are recorded there, exhibit

hibit a light, which the ingenuity of man in vain attempts to obscure. Who that reads the history of the Patriarchs, and the commendations bestowed upon them, can doubt the efficacy of faith to produce obedience, or the nature of that obedience that ought to be produced? After all the allowance that must of necessity be made for a diversity of situation between them and us, the principle by which they were actuated remains the same, and its operation also must be the same, as far as the circumstances in which we are, agree with theirs. It is manifest that the catalogue which is here given us of holy men, was not recorded merely for the sake of historical information, but for our instruction in righteousness, and as an incentive to imitate their virtues. The passage before us relates to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who alone "had opportunity to return to the country which they had left:" confining therefore our attention to them, we shall shew,

I. Wherein they excelled—

From the account given of them in the text, we are led to admire,

1. The strength of their faith—

[They were taught to expect a numerous seed, and the possession of the land of Canaan: and, together with these temporal blessings, others of a far sublimer nature were promised; namely, a descendant in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed; and an everlasting inheritance in heaven — — — These promises they did not see accomplished: yea, not even the temporal blessings did they receive: for in the space of two hundred and forty years their posterity *in the promised line* amounted to but seventy; and Jacob, after sojourning as a stranger in Canaan, died in Egypt. But the Patriarchs "walked by faith, and not by sight;" and, notwithstanding all their discouragements and delays, held fast their confidence even unto death: "they all died in faith."]

2. Its practical effects—

[Expecting higher blessings than this world could afford, they disregarded the things of time and sense as of little value — — — They considered themselves as mere "pilgrims and sojourners on the earth," and repeatedly "confessed" this to be

their true and proper character[a]. This correspondence between their principles and their practice marked both the sincerity and efficacy of their faith, and was, in fact, their highest commendation.]

It will be easily seen from hence,

II. Wherein they should be imitated—

We are certainly not required to resemble them in their wandering unsettled kind of life; but we should imitate them,

1. In the state of their minds—

[We have promises, as they also had; and promises which yet remain to be fulfilled to us. God has not only assured us of acceptance with him in and through his beloved Son, but has engaged to send his Holy Spirit into our hearts, for the carrying on and perfecting his work within us. We meet with many delays and difficulties, which at times disquiet our minds, and lead us almost to doubt the truth of the promises themselves: but we should "against hope believe in hope:" yea, we should "hold fast the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end." If God be true to his word, and able to perform it, "not one jot or tittle of it can ever fail." Convinced of this, we should say, "though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."]

2. In the habit of their lives—

[The name "pilgrims and strangers" was not given to the Patriarchs merely on account of their sojourning in a strange land; for David, after he was established on his throne, and had subdued all his enemies on every side, assumes the same title[b]; and the same appellation is given to us also under the Christian dispensation[c]. Though we are not called to dwell in moveable habitations, we, as much as the Patriarchs themselves, should answer to the character of pilgrims. We should feel only indifference to the things of this world — — — We should be daily advancing towards the heavenly world — — — And we should look forward to death as the consummation of all our happiness — — —]

[a] Gen. xxiii. 4. & xlvii. 9. [b] 1 Chron. xxix. 15. [c] 1 Pet. ii. 11.

MCXX.

ABRAHAM OFFERING UP ISAAC.

Heb. xi. 17—19. *By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered*

up

up his only-begotten son; of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

THE whole life of the Patriarchs was an apt illustration of the life of faith; because, when they had abundant opportunities of returning to the country from whence they had come out, they refused to do so, and preferred living as strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land, testifying plainly to all around them, that they regarded not this world as their home, but were in pursuit of a better, that is, an heavenly country[a]. The Apostle, having shewn us this, returns to the case of Abraham, of whose faith he had already spoken in terms of high commendation, but whose principal act of faith remained yet to be noticed, as being the most illustrious exercise of that grace which the world had ever seen. This we are now to consider: and it will indeed be found profitable to mark,

I. The wonderful transaction here recorded—

God issued a command to Abraham to offer up his son—

[This was such a command as was sufficient to confound his reason, and to excite in his mind a doubt whether it could proceed from a God of truth and love. The account is given us in the 22nd chapter of Genesis, where all the circumstances that attended it are recorded. Abraham had had a son given to him in his old age, when neither he nor his wife, according to the common course of nature, could hope for any progeny. This son was constituted the appointed medium for bringing into the world "the Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed." Yet this son was Abraham to take, and with his own hands to offer him up a burnt-offering to the Lord. Upon the delivery of this command, we might suppose him almost of necessity to say, Can this proceed from God? Can he, not only take away thus the life of an innocent youth, but require me, the father of that youth, to be his executioner? Surely the suggestion comes rather from Satan, who seeing that this youth is to be the progenitor of the Messiah, the Redeemer of the World, would take advantage of my desire to please God, and make me his instrument to defeat the purposes of the Almighty, by destroying the very person to

[a] ver. 13—16.

to whom the promises are made. But he had no doubt whence the voice proceeded; and therefore]

This command he instantly set himself to fulfil—

[He "conferred not with flesh and blood:" he listened not to the dictates of carnal reason, nor consulted for a moment the judgment of his wife; but addressed himself to his arduous duty with *readiness*, with *perseverance*, and with a *fortitude* that was invincible. "He rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place which God had told him[b]." But so distant was the appointed place, that he reached it not till the third day. What a time was here for meditation and reflection! and what conflicts may we suppose him to have experienced in his soul between parental love and duty to his God! Yet he persevered; yea, when the beloved youth, seeing in his father's hands the knife that was to slay the sacrifice, and the fire that was to consume it, put the touching question; "My father, behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" still he maintained his resolution; and, waving any direct answer to it, proceeded to the place. There, no doubt, he revealed the matter to his son, who acquiesced in the Divine appointment; and then, having laid the wood in order, and bound his son, raised the knife to inflict the fatal wound. With what more than human firmness must he have been endowed, to execute an act so revolting to all the feelings of his nature, and so likely to transmit his name with infamy to the remotest posterity! How was it that he acquired strength to perform the act?]

In the execution of it he was animated and upheld by faith—

[To this principle his obedience is expressly ascribed: "By faith he offered Isaac." Mere reason would suggest to him, that, in destroying his son, he would annihilate the hopes of the whole world, founded as they were on the progeny that should hereafter spring from his loins. But by faith he was so persuaded both of the truth of God in his promises, and of his power to accomplish them, that he hesitated not to obey the Divine mandate; assured that, though his son were slain and burnt to ashes, God would rather raise him up to life again than suffer one jot or tittle of his word to fail. What though no instance of such an interposition had ever yet existed? that was no reason that it should not exist, if it were necessary to the performance of the Divine promises. Indeed an interposition little short of that, had already existed in the very birth of Isaac, who had been given to him, when neither he nor Sarah could, according to nature, have any hope of an offspring:

[b] Gen. xxii. 3.

offspring: and as Omnipotence had given that son in accomplishment of a promise, so the same Almighty Power both could, and would, restore him even from the dead.

Nor was he in this respect disappointed of his hope: for, in the moment his hand was lifted up to slay his son, God arrested his arm, and forbad the execution of his purpose, accepting the will for the deed, and accounting that as actually done which in an instant of time would have been irrevocably done, if the same authority that enjoined it had not interposed to prevent it: so that Abraham is always spoken of as having actually offered up his son; and as having, "in a figure, received him again from the dead."]

Now, as in this transaction there are several different points to be attended to, so will there be a corresponding diversity in,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

We may learn,

1. *From his trial,* the use and intent of trials—

[God is said to have "tempted Abraham." But we are not to understand from this that he did any thing with a view to lead Abraham to the commission of evil: in that sense "God never tempts any man: and if any man be drawn to the commission of sin, it is only through the influence of his own in-dwelling corruptions[c]." But God gave him this command, in order that it might be seen, both by Abraham himself and by the world at large, whether he had grace to execute it. God, in all his dispensations towards the Jews in the Wilderness, had the same object in view, as Moses informed them at their commencement of their journeying in the Wilderness[d], and afterwards reminded them just previous to their entrance into Canaan[e]. He warned them also that at all future periods they must be on their guard not to be drawn aside from Jehovah by persons pretending to a divine authority, even though they should work miracles in confirmation of their word, or utter prophecies that should eventually come to pass; for that God would suffer such pretenders to arise, in order to put their fidelity to the test, and to give them an opportunity of evincing what was in their hearts[f]. God himself indeed needed not for his own information such events; for he knew what was in man, whether it was brought forth into act, or not: but they themselves could know it only by seeing the actual operation of their own principles: and therefore, for the comfort of some, and the humiliation of others, he suffered their principles to be brought to the test, and afforded by his own dispensations

[c] Jam. i. 13, 14.
[d] Exod. xvi. 4.
[e] Deut. viii. 2.
[f] Deut. xiii. 1—3.

dispensations an occasion for their internal graces or weaknesses to display themselves[g]. It is for the same end that God at this day suffers obstacles of various kinds to be put in the way of his people; he does it, that their faith may be tried; and that, if it stand the trial, redoubled benefits may accrue unto them[h]. Know ye then that these temptations, which are to so many an occasion of falling, are intended of God to be to you an occasion of approving your fidelity to him. The prospect of some advantage, or of the gratification of a forbidden appetite, presents itself to you: and by it God says, "Now, which will you prefer, my honour or your own lust? Look to it, that you be stedfast in your obedience to me." In like manner, when persecution arises because of the word, or when any who profess godliness make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, it is all permitted by God, as far as you are concerned, on purpose to detect your hypocrisy, if you are unsound at heart; or to evince the stedfastness of your faith in him. Make then this improvement of every temptation, that you may come out of it as gold from the furnace, and prove by means of it "the sincerity of your love[i]."]

2. *From the graces which carried him through it,* the different offices of faith and fear—

[The particular end of this temptation was, to discover whether Abraham truly "feared God[k]:" and God acknowledges that that point was by the obedience of his servant clearly ascertained. Now by "fear," is meant such a reverential awe of the Divine Majesty, as swallows up all other considerations, and determines us to fulfil God's will at all events. It annihilates all other fear, and constrains the soul to reply to its persecutors, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for I cannot but proceed in my duty to him, though the whole world should combine to oppress me[l]." But fear alone would be ineffectual to prevail in so great a warfare: therefore faith comes to its aid; and presents to the mind the promises of God; the promise of effectual aid in the conflict, and of an abundant recompence after it. Without this succour, our spirit would soon fail: but under an assurance that God will fulfil his word, we are enabled to go forth "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," and to defy the whole universe to "separate us from the love of Christ." The two should always be united; the one to operate as a stimulus, and the other as an encouragement. If either be wanting, our obedience will be very imperfect: it will want that holy reverence which we should ever maintain even in the midst of our most exalted joys, or that filial confidence which so peculiarly pleases and honours God,

[g] 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. [h] 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13. [i] 2 Cor. viii. 8.
[k] Gen. xxii. 12. [l] Acts iv. 19, 20.

God. See then, Brethren, that, however difficult the service be which God requires of you, it be performed resolutely and without delay. Let no consideration under heaven weigh with you, any more than the dust upon the balance, in opposition to any known command. And whilst you labour to obey God's precepts, hold fast his promises with a confidence that nothing can shake. Listen not to any carnal reasonings, however specious they may be, when once you know what the word of God requires. Duty is yours: events are God's. Labour you to execute your part; and leave him to fulfil his, in his own way, and in his own time. Let it suffice for your encouragement, that "he is faithful who hath promised;" and, that "what he hath promised he is able also to perform."]

3. *From the issue of his trial,* the benefit of approving ourselves faithful to our God—

["By this act of his he was justified." As a sinner, indeed, he had been accepted of God forty years before, as soon as ever he believed in that promised "Seed who was to be born of him, and in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed:" and in that sense he was justified by faith only[m]. But St. James says truly, that "he was justified by works also, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar[n];" for by that act he was justified in his own conscience, and justified before the whole world. A tree may be good: but how shall it be known to be good but by its fruit? It is then only perfect when it is laden with fruit, and thus demonstrated to be good. And Abraham, though previously pardoned and accepted by his God, was then proved and evidenced to be a righteous character, and in a state of acceptance with God, when by this astonishing act of obedience he displayed the reality and efficacy of his faith. From that time he was honoured with that glorious appellation, "The friend of God:" and, for his farther encouragement, God confirmed all his promises to him with an oath[o]; that by these two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, he might have the stronger consolation. Nay more, his Isaac, whom, in his mind and purpose, he had sacrificed, was now restored to him: and oh! to what unspeakable advantage! What a delight would he henceforth feel in a son so given, and so restored to him as from the dead!

And shall we find it in vain to sacrifice any thing to the Lord? Shall we not, in proportion to the greatness of our sacrifices, and the willingness with which they have been offered, have an evidence in our souls that we are in favour with God? Will not the very exercise of such grace demonstrate to us the truth and efficacy of the grace we have received? And, when we have shewn

[m] Rom. iv. 3—5, 9—11, 20—22. [n] James ii. 21—23.
[o] Gen. xxii. 16.

shewn such love to God, can we entertain any doubt of God's love to us? Shall we feel any difficulty in concluding, that, if we have so chosen and loved God, "he has first chosen and loved us[p]?" Moreover, God will give unto us the witness of his Spirit, assuring us that we are indeed his children, and his friends[q]. This is what St. Paul has plainly taught us to expect: He tells us, that "tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience[r]; (that is, an evidence arising from trial, such an evidence as the gold has of its purity after having stood the trial of the fire;) and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us[s]." Fear not then, any of you, to sacrifice your very Isaac to the Lord, if called to it. The trial may be painful at the time, but "it shall be to your praise and honour and glory, as well as unto the praise and honour and glory of your God, at the appearing of Jesus Christ[t]."]

4. *From the typical aspect of the whole*, the transcendent love of God to man—

[It is said, that "Abraham received Isaac from the dead *in a figure*[u]." This expression many interpret as importing that the whole of this history was a type or figure of our redemption by Christ. Whether that be the true import of the expression or not, I can have no doubt but that the whole transaction was typical of that most astonishing and incomprehensible mystery, the gift of God's only-begotten Son to "die for our sins, and to be raised again for our justification." Behold then, the love of God in this! Do we admire the obedience of Abraham to the Divine command? Oh! what shall we say of the love of Almighty God, who, without any necessity on his own part, or any solicitation on ours, gave his only-begotten Son, not to die by a wound which inflicted pain only for a moment, but under the curse due to sin, even to the sins of the whole world? From all eternity did he ordain this sacrifice; and never drew back from his purpose. When his Son intreated with strong crying and tears to have the cup taken away from him, it was not removed; but was given him to drink even to the dregs. With his own hand too did the Father inflict the fatal wound; yes, "it pleased the Lord Jehovah to bruise him[x]." For Isaac, the Lord accepted a substitute, a ram caught in the thicket: but no substitute was found for the Lord Jesus Christ, seeing that he himself was the substitute for a guilty world: and, in token that his sacrifice had made a full atonement for sin, he was raised from the dead, and exalted to heaven,

[p] John xv. 16. 1 John iv. 10.
[q] Rom. viii. 16. 1 John iii. 24.
[r] δοκιμὴν.
[s] Rom. v. 3—5.
[t] 1 Pet. i 7.
[u] ἐν παραβολῇ.
[x] Isai. liii. 10.

heaven, to carry on and perfect there the work which he began on earth. What shall we say to this love? The height, the depth, the length, the breadth of it, how unsearchable! how utterly incomprehensible! Turn then your eyes from Abraham to Abraham's God: or, if you look at Abraham at all, let it be not so much to admire, as to imitate, his obedience. "He saw by faith the day of Christ, and seeing it, he rejoiced;" and counted no sacrifice too costly to honour him. Your views of Christ, and of the Father's love in him, are incomparably clearer than ever Abraham's were: and therefore, if it be possible, your obedience should be proportionably more prompt, more self-denying, and more firm. Let then every lust be sacrificed to God without reserve, and every interest too that may stand in the way of your duty to him. So shall you be children of Abraham indeed, and be acknowledged the friends of God by him, who will reward every man according to his works.]

MCXXI.

MOSES' CHOICE.

Heb. xi. 24—26. *By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.*

IT is a great advantage to us to be conversant with the holy Scriptures, not only because from them we learn the principles of religion, which can be derived from no other source, but because we see in them examples which have upon them the stamp and impress of God's approbation, and which therefore we cannot presume to disapprove. Had any individual of the present day acted as Moses did in the instance before us, we should, I doubt not, have all agreed in condemning him as inconsiderate, enthusiastic, and unwise. Not knowing his motives, or not giving him credit for them, we could not have formed a correct judgment of his actions: but we are sure that the choice which Moses made, however absurd it might appear to those more immediately connected with him, was truly commendable.

mendable. In bringing it before you, I shall endeavour,

I. To explain it—

Two things must here be noticed:

1. His conduct—

[He was, next to Pharaoh, the first man in the whole land of Egypt, having been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter as her son, and being regarded as such by Pharaoh himself. All the pleasures, the riches, and the honours that man could possess, with the exception only of the imperial diadem, were within his reach, or rather he was in the actual enjoyment of them. Yet the whole of these did he renounce: and not at a season when by reason of youth he was unable to form a just estimate of them, or by reason of age was incapable of enjoying them, but in the very prime of life, at the age of forty, when he had arrived at full maturity both of body and mind[a]: and when, from "being learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians[b]," he was able to relish them with a zest, which a vulgar and uninstructed mind knows nothing of, and which nothing but refinement can bestow. All these he sacrificed voluntarily and with a determined purpose, "refusing" to be recognized any longer under the august character of Pharaoh's daughter, and choosing rather to appear in his own proper character as a child of Abraham.

Whilst Moses was in this exalted station, his brethren according to the flesh were suffering under the most grievous oppression. To unite himself with them, was to subject himself to all the reproach and cruelty under which they groaned. Yet he acknowledged them as his kindred; and voluntarily participated with them in their lot: decending thus at once from the highest eminence in the kingdom to the lowest state of degradation and infamy.]

To obtain a just view of this conduct we must notice,

2. The principle from which it proceeded—

[We are told that he acted thus "by faith." By faith, he saw that the Hebrews were exclusively "the people of God;" and that, as such, whatever they might endure from man, they were and must be happy; since God, the God of the whole earth, was their God, and esteemed them as his own peculiar treasure. He saw too, that the reproach that was cast upon them was "cast upon them for the sake of Christ," in whom they professed to believe as their future Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Had they chosen to intermarry with the Egyptians, and become one

[a] Ex. ii. 11, Acts vii. 23. [b] Acts vii. 22.

one people with them, they would have suffered nothing from Pharaoh, but would have fared as the rest of his subjects: but, holding fast their regard for Abraham as their father, and their expectation of Christ as to spring from one of his descendants, they exposed themselves to all the injuries which an envious, cruel, and despotic monarch could inflict: so that their reproach was properly "the reproach of Christ," Christ himself being the object of it, and suffering it as it were in the person of his people[c]. He saw yet further, that the afflictions which they endured for Christ's sake should in due time be recompensed; and, that all who participated in their sufferings, should partake also of their reward. As the Patriarchs looked by faith to a heavenly city, and a heavenly country, so did Moses look to a heavenly reward; in the prospect of which he was willing to forego all that this world could give him, and to sustain all that his most potent and malicious enemies could inflict upon him. Indeed in this view he esteemed reproach to be "riches," "great riches," yea, "greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt."]

But as the wisdom of this conduct may be doubted, I shall proceed,

II. To vindicate it—

It may be thought that this measure was unnecessary, inexpedient, and absurd: but,

1. It was not unnecessary—

[Circumstanced as he was, it became him to act as he did. He was, I grant, greatly indebted to Pharaoh's daughter: and he was bound to regard her with all the duteous affection which belonged to the relation into which he had been adopted by her. But his duty to the God of Abraham was paramount to every other: and he would have sinned, if he had merged his fidelity to God in his regards for any creature whatsoever. All the pleasures which he had enjoyed, however innocent in themselves, were "pleasures of sin," as long as he continued to acknowledge the God of the Hebrews as his God, and the faith of the Hebrews as his faith. The neglecting to confess his God was, constructively, to deny him: and, if he continued any longer to deny God, he could expect nothing but to be denied of God in the day of judgment. The measure therefore which he adopted was not unnecessary, but absolutely necessary, both for his peace in this world, and his happiness in the world to come.]

2. It was not inexpedient—

[It might be supposed, that if he had continued, like Joseph, at the head of the Egyptian government, he might have mitigated

[c] See Acts ix. 4. Col. i. 24.

gated their sorrows, even though he should never be able to effect their release. But he had a secret intimation from God, that the time of their deliverance drew nigh, and that he was to be the instrument by whom they should be delivered. And so strong was this impression upon his mind, that he engaged in the work rashly and prematurely; without any direction from God; and thereby reduced himself to the necessity of fleeing to a foreign land, to avoid the punishment to which his own unwarrantable temerity had exposed him[d]. The question in his mind was, What duty to his God required? and he was not at liberty to calculate then on matters of expediency, or to weigh in the balance of carnal reason the possible or probable issues of different events. His duty was to obey God; and to leave to God to save his people in his own time and way, according to his own infallible and eternal counsels.]

3. It was not absurd—

[Moses looked beyond the concerns of time, and acted with eternity in view. He knew that his pleasures, riches, and honours, how great soever they were, were only "for a season;" and that the afflictions to which he was about to subject himself, were also "for a season" only; whereas the recompense which his sacrifices would insure him, was eternal. What comparison then could there be between these things? or what room was there for hesitating one moment which he should prefer? If he gained the whole world, what would it profit him, if he lost his own soul? or if, by sacrificing the whole world, his soul should be saved, what reason could he have to regret the sacrifice? His choice then was that which sound wisdom dictated, and true piety inspired.

In truth, this is no other choice than what all the Prophets and Apostles in their respective ages have approved. David "would rather be a door-keeper in the house of his God than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness[e]:" And why? Because, as he tells us in another Psalm, "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked[f];" better in its possession, better in its operation, better in its end. Solomon was of precisely the same mind[g]. St. Paul, like Moses, actually "suffered the loss of all things, and accounted them but dung, that he might win Christ[h]." Having made a sacrifice of every thing, so far was he from feeling himself impoverished by his loss, that, "when he had nothing, he accounted himself as possessing all things[i];" and actually "took pleasure in all his necessities and distresses, from a consideration of the benefit which would accrue from them to himself, and the glory to his Lord and Master[k]." St. Peter confirms this view of the subject most fully, and

[d] Acts vii. 24—29. [e] Ps. lxxxiv. 10. [f] Ps. xxxvii. 16.
[g] Prov. xv. 16, 17. [h] Phil. iii. 8. [i] 2 Cor. vi. 10.
[k] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

and in terms too which are peculiarly applicable to the case before us: for he declares, that the sufferings of God's people are "Christ's sufferings;" that from them arises much honour to God, and much benefit to the soul; and that they are rather to be accounted grounds of joy, than occasions of sorrow and regret[l]. To these I will only add the testimony of our Lord himself, who, in the epistle to the Church of Smyrna says, "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty; but thou art rich[m]."

After such testimonies as these, we cannot but approve the conduct to which our text refers.]

From this subject then we may SEE,

1. How erroneous are the views of wordly men!

[The men of this world set a high value on the things of time and sense, whilst sin appears in their eyes but a light and venial evil. By them, suffering is more dreaded than sin: and the loss of an opportunity of honouring God is of no account in comparison of the loss of great honours and great emoluments. They will strain every nerve to combine the irreconcileable services of God and Mammon: and, if the one or the other must be sacrificed, they will hold fast their pleasures, their riches, and their honours, instead of parting with them for the Lord. "To forsake all and follow Christ," is to them a hard lesson, which they cannot, and will not, learn. But the example of Moses must be followed by us all, so far at least as our circumstances are similar to his. We must all confess Christ openly before men. We must all unite ourselves to his people, and take our portion with them. Whatever cross may lay in our way, we must take it up cheerfully, and bear it after him, "going forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach[n]." We are not indeed of necessity called to renounce the highest distinctions: because they may be held, and the most important offices in the state may be executed, in perfect consistency with our duty to God; as no doubt they were by Daniel: but if the hope of acquiring eminence, or the fear of losing it, deter us from the performance of any duty, or lead us to a compliance with any sin, we are then called to take the decided part that Moses did, and to forsake all for Christ. Let us then not seek great things either for ourselves or our children: or, if we possess them, let us not seek our happiness in them, but in God alone. If we possess not his favour, though we had kingdoms in our possession, we are poor: but if he be our God, then, though bereft of every thing else, we are rich.]

2. How blessed they are who live by faith!

[True it is that the whole of their life is foolishness in the eyes of unconverted men: and they must of necessity meet with many

[l] 1 Pet. iv. 12—14. [m] Rev. ii. 9. [n] Heb. xiii. 13.

many reproaches and persecutions for the truth's sake. But, notwithstanding all that they are, or can be, called to endure for righteousness' sake, *the very worst of their portion is better than the best of the portion of ungodly men:* the best that the world can give, is its treasures: and the worst that the Believer can receive, is his reproaches and persecutions: yet is the reproach which the Believer sustains for Christ's sake, greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. How superior then must the Believer's portion be in the eternal world! If the Believer in a dungeon is richer, and happier, than the Unbeliever on a throne, what must his portion in heaven be when compared with the Unbeliever's in hell! Be not dejected then, ye who are despised or persecuted for Christ's sake, but by faith view your privileges, and expect your reward. Our blessed Lord has set forth the worst of your portion, and pronounced you in the midst of all "blessed." And he has set forth the best of the Unbeliever's portion, and denounced nothing but "woes" against him in the midst of all[o]. Take but eternity into your estimate of things, and have respect unto the recompense of your reward in heaven; then will every sacrifice be small, every suffering light, every service easy. In such a frame you will rejoice to suffer shame for Christ's sake, and account death itself, though of the most violent and cruel kind, a subject of desire rather than of fear, of self-congratulation rather than of sorrow[p].].

[o] Luke vi. 20—26. [p] Phil. ii. 17.

MCXXII.

MOSES' FAITH IN RELATION TO THE PASSOVER.

Heb. xi. 28. *Through faith he kept the passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the first-born should touch them.*

PERSONS, when speaking upon the comparative excellencies of faith and works, are very apt to overlook the relation which they bear to each other: whereas there is no true faith which is not productive of good works; nor are there any works truly good, which do not proceed from faith as their root and principle. Supposing that they could exist separately, the preference might justly be given to good works: because they are the end, whilst faith is only the means to that end. Detach from each other the root and fruit of a tree; and no one will hesitate

to

to prefer the fruit. But they cannot be separated; they are to each other as the cause and effect: and in proportion as any one values good works, he ought to value faith, as their originating and productive cause. True it is that there are works which are reputed good, and which may be done by an infidel or a heathen: and these, imperfect as they are, are certainly better than a barren and inoperative faith: but works that are truly good can proceed from faith alone: and the peculiar excellence of faith is, that it is the spring and source from whence all good works proceed; and from whence they will naturally proceed, as its genuine fruit and offspring. It is on this account that the Apostle accumulates in the chapter before us so many instances of a lively faith. A person ignorant of true Christianity would expatiate only upon the works: but the Apostle traces the streams to the fountain-head; and fixes our attention upon that faith from whence they flowed.

In considering the faith of Moses, as recorded in the text, we shall mark,

I. The particular act by which it displayed itself in him—

God had determined to destroy the first-born both of man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt, with the exception of those belonging to his own oppressed and afflicted people. But when the destroying angel should be sent forth to execute this judgment, how should the Hebrews be distinguished by him? And how should he know where to strike, and where to forbear?

For the preservation of his people God appointed peculiar means—

[The whole account is given us in the twelfth chapter of Exodus. A lamb was to be killed by every family of the Hebrews. Its blood was to be poured forth into a bason, and to be sprinkled with hyssop upon the lintel and the side-posts of their doors; (not upon the threshold; for that sacred blood was not to be trampled on by any:) and the flesh of the lamb was to be eaten, (not raw, or sodden, but roast with fire,) with bitter herbs, and

and with certain forms, which it is not to our present purpose to specify. The blood so sprinkled was to serve *to them* as a pledge of their security, and to the angel as *a token* that he was to pass over that house which was so protected. And in remembrance of this deliverance, the ordinance so instituted was ever after to be called the Passover.]

These means Moses used in faith—

[He gave the necessary directions to the Jewish people, who instantly carried them into effect. In this both Moses and the people shewed the power of faith. Moses doubted not but that in the space of a few hours God would inflict the threatened vengeance on all the first-born of Egypt: nor did he doubt but that the simple means proposed would prove effectual for the preservation of the Hebrews. He did not attempt to station any centinel at the door of one single family for the purpose of calling the attention of the angel to the blood that had been sprinkled; but with perfect confidence addressed himself to the observance of the ordinances that had been appointed, having no thought that any other precaution was necessary, nor any fear that the destroying angel would through ignorance or inadvertence exceed the commission he had received.]

And these means proved effectual—

[At midnight the judgment was executed throughout all the land of Egypt, so that there was not a single house wherein the first-born was not dead, even from the first-born of Pharaoh himself to the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon. But of the first-born belonging to Israel, not one was hurt; "the destroyer had not touched so much as one of them."]

Without dwelling unnecessarily upon this [illegible] act, by which faith displayed itself in Mose[illegible] proceed to notice,

II. The corresponding act by which it is to shew itself in us—

The whole human race, as transgressors of the law, are obnoxious to the wrath of an avenging God. But God has appointed means of safety to all who will make use of them in faith. He has sent his own Son to die a sacrifice for sin; and has appointed HIM to be the only means of our preservation.

We are to seek deliverance through him, precisely as the Hebrews did through the Paschal Lamb—

[This is told us by St. Paul, who says, "Christ our Passover is

is sacrificed for us[a]," thus identifying the Lord Jesus with the Paschal Lamb as the type, of which HE is the great antitype.

Now the first thing we have to do, is to sprinkle our souls with his blood. There is no other protection than this for any human being. We may bring all the good works which ever were wrought by any mortal man, and they will not avert the stroke of Divine justice. No means will suffice, but those which God himself has appointed. Whether we see any suitableness in the means or not, they are to be used, and used in faith. Nothing is to be substituted as more conducive to the end; nothing to be added, to increase the efficacy of this simple ordinance. The Lamb of God is slain: his blood is poured forth: we are by faith to sprinkle it on our souls, assured that, when we have put ourselves under that safeguard, "there can be no condemnation to us[b];" but that, "Christ will be to us as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land[c]." If we attempt to substitute any thing for this, or to add any thing to it, we destroy its efficacy altogether, and render it of no avail[d].

We must also feast upon the flesh of this great Sacrifice, in token of the full confidence which we have in our safety through him, and as the means of deriving fresh supplies of strength from him. How strongly has our blessed Lord himself inculcated this truth; "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you[e]." We must eat it indeed, "with the bitter herbs" of repentance, and "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth[f]." But we must eat it as "a feast," yea, as "a feast of fat things[g];" and we shall then find it a source of all needful strength unto our souls[h].]

We shall then find in him the same security—

[Of all the first-born that belonged to Israel, the destroyer "touched not" so much as one. And who ever perished, after having fled to Christ for refuge, and sprinkled their souls with his atoning blood? In what instance did the destroyer ever overlook the sign, or the sign prove an ineffectual guard against his uplifted arm? If Christ be "a propitiation for the sins of *the whole world*," and his blood be able to cleanse from *all* sin, then may all trust in him as "able to save them to the uttermost; nor shall any one that trusts in him be ashamed or confounded world without end."]

Here then we SEE, in a striking point of view,

1. In

[a] 1 Cor. v. 7. [b] Rom. viii. 1. [c] Isai. xxxii. 2.
[d] 1 Cor. iii. 11. Gal. v. 2—4. [e] John vi. 53—56.
[f] Exod. xii. 8. with 1 Cor. v. 8. [g] Isai. xxv. 6.
[h] Isai. xxv. 4.

1. In what an awful state they are who neglect the Gospel of Christ!

[The people of Egypt, unconscious of the impending judgment, or unconcerned about it, retired to rest as secure as usual. But at midnight, when they were all asleep, it came upon them; so that "there was a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt: for there was not a house where there was not one dead[i]." In that instance the cry was amongst the survivors. But amongst ourselves, when persons are summoned to their great account, there is no apprehension excited, lest they should have fallen as monuments of God's wrath. We mourn the loss of them as relatives; but as for the vengeance that may have seized them in the midst of their security, we think not of it. But of the thousands that are daily swept away, how fearful is the doom of the generality! What shrieks, what cries are uttered by them on their first entrance into the presence of their God! Could we but hear one of them, Oh! how would it pierce our inmost souls! Yet, if we did hear it, our terror would operate with no more abiding effect, than did that of the Egyptians; who no sooner found that the Israelites were "entangled in the land," than they pursued after them with the most vindictive wrath to destroy them. But, Beloved, know that the judgments of God will be executed, whether ye believe it or not. Your presumptuous security will avail you nothing. What did it avail the antediluvian world? Did not the deluge come the very same day that Noah entered into the ark? and did not all experience the fate which they had been warned to expect? Yes; every day and hour brought it nearer to them: and in like manner, "your judgment also lingereth not, and your damnation slumbereth not[k]." Awake then from your slumbers, ye foolish virgins, ere the Bridegroom come: and as ye know not at what hour he will come, lose not another in fleeing from the wrath to come, and laying hold on eternal life.]

2. How happy and secure they are who truly believe in Christ!

[Realize to yourselves one moment the different states of the Israelites and the Egyptians on that night, when the angel was spreading death and destruction all around him. Behold the consternation that pervaded all the families of Egypt; and then look within the houses of the Hebrews, and behold their serenity and joy. O what a contrast! And all through the influence of faith! So it is at this hour with those who truly believe. They know what judgments are coming on the whole world of the ungodly: they know, that they themselves deserve them, as much as any other persons whatsoever: they know, that nothing which they can do, can avert the stroke of Divine justice: but they know that

[i] Exod. xii. 30. [k] 2 Pet. ii. 2—5.

that God has appointed means of safety: they know that, however inadequate according to our vain conceits the means may be to the end, they are, and shall be, effectual to all who use them in faith: they are conscious that they have used them; and that they renounce every other ground of hope, and place their dependence solely on the blood of the Paschal Lamb. They are feasting too from day to day on the flesh of that Paschal Lamb; and they have no wish but to cast off the yoke of Egypt, and to prosecute their journey to the promised land. The peace which others have, if it may be called peace, is owing to their disbelief of their danger: but the peace of the godly arises from their view of the sufficiency of Christ to save them, and of the faithfulness of God to all who hope in his promised mercy. Take ye them, my Beloved Brethren, the Israelites for your example. Take them *at that precise moment*, with "their loins girt, and shoes on their feet, and staves in their hands, and eating their sacrifice in haste," ready at any instant to obey the Divine mandate, and to go forth to Canaan under the Divine guidance and protection. Then shall ye be Christ's disciples indeed: and then "shall ye eat, whilst others are hungry; and drink, whilst others are thirsty: then shall ye rejoice, whilst others are ashamed; and sing for joy of heart, whilst others cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit[l]."]

3. With what delight we should all welcome the return of this day[m]!

[To the people of Israel this day was enjoined to be observed even to the latest generations as the most memorable day in the whole year. And well might that night be termed, "a night to be much observed unto the Lord[n]." Methinks, the annual return of it, to those who bore in remembrance the mercies then vouchsafed to them, could not fail of filling their souls with the most lively joy, since then, and not till then, was their deliverance complete. But what was *their* redemption when compared with that which *we* have experienced, and which was completed as on this day, when our Lord and Saviour rose from the dead? Till then, he himself lay a captive in the grave: but then he triumphed over all his enemies, and "led captivity itself captive." If you say, 'True, but my enemies still live and are mighty; and they still follow me, and will reduce me again to my former bondage;' fear not; for though they will follow you, they shall not prevail against you; and shall only follow, in order that God's power may be the more magnified in their final destruction. Assert then your liberty: go forth under the Divine protection;

[l] Isai. lxv. 13, 14.

[m] This conclusion is adapted only to EASTER DAY, on which the 12th Chapter of Exodus is read as the First Lesson for the day.

[n] Exod. xii. 42.

tection: harbour no unbelieving fears. Is there a sea before you? it shall open, and afford a dry path for your feet. Is there then nothing but a dreary wilderness before you, where you will be exposed to all manner of dangers and necessities? Fear not; for "you shall dwell on high: your house of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given you, and your waters shall be sure: your eyes too shall behold your King in his beauty; they shall behold also the land that is very far off°." Are ye laden with any measure of Egyptian gold? Bring it forth with you, and consecrate it to the service of your God. It was with that that Moses furnished the tabernacle of old: and God will make use of your talents also, whatever they may be, for the enriching of his sanctuary, and the advancement of his glory. Come then, ye who know the value of redemption, and pant after perfect liberty; and behold the Paschal Lamb, now already roasted by the fire of God's wrath, and set before you, as it were, on the table of the Lord. There is the very Paschal Lamb: come feast upon it with love and gratitude: eat it, and be satisfied: eat it, and be strengthened: eat it, and live for evermore: for Christ himself invites you: "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up to the enjoyment of it at the last day: for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."]

° Isai. xxxiii. 16, 17.

MCXXIII.

THE WALLS OF JERICHO THROWN DOWN BY FAITH.

Heb. xi. 30. *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were encompassed about seven days.*

HOW intelligent creatures should be affected by any principle, is easy to be conceived; because the human mind is susceptible of the strongest impressions from every thing that is submitted to its consideration. But what connexion any principle can have with inanimate creatures, any farther than through its influence on human agents, does not at first sight appear. Take the principle of *love*, for instance. We may love the flowers which are growing in our garden: but any farther than our love operates to secure attention to those flowers, they will be altogether unaffected by it. But there is a peculiarity in the principle of *faith* which does not attach

attach to any other principle whatever; namely, that it has respect to God, and calls forth his power; and is therefore capable of influencing every thing, whether in heaven or earth. A surprising effect of it is mentioned in reference to the walls of Jericho, which through its powerful operation were thrown down.

In speaking of faith as illustrated by that event, we shall be led to notice,

I. Its distinguishing properties—

Wherever a living faith exists in the soul, it will approve itself by,

1. A patient observance of the appointed means—

[The means appointed for the capture of that fortress were certainly very peculiar. The Israelites, who were encamped against it, were to walk in procession around it seven successive days in perfect silence; the trumpets only blowing. On the seventh day, they were to go round it seven times, and then to shout: and at the precise moment that they shouted, the walls were to fall, and open for them a free passage into the city. These means they used. They did not pour contempt upon them as unsuited to the end: nor did they grow weary in the use of them: nor did they attempt to add any thing to them. They felt that it was not for them to canvas the wisdom of God's appointments, but to obey them: and therefore they followed implicitly the Divine command*, and "compassed the city seven days."

Such is universally the operation of true faith. God has appointed means for the salvation of the soul. He requires that we should repent of all our past sins; that we should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as having offered an atonement for sin; and that we should give up ourselves to Christ, to be washed by his blood, and to be renewed by his Spirit. In order to further this work within us, he has prescribed means to be used by us both in public and in private: in public, we must attend on his ordinances; because, as he is peculiarly honoured by them, so he is pleased to make them in a more especial manner the channels of his gracious communications to our souls: in private, we must read his blessed word, and meditate upon it, and pray over it; and, through the influence of his Spirit, endeavour to mortify the whole body of sin. We are not to be questioning the use and efficacy of these means, but to use them in obedience to our God.

* Josh. vi. 1—16.

God. True faith will not say, like Naaman, "Are not Abana and Pharpar better than all the waters of Israel? and may I not wash in *them* and be clean[b]?" but it will go to Jordan, according to the direction given, and expect the blessing only in the use of those ordinances which God has prescribed.]

2. A confident expectation of the promised end—

[At the appointed time the Jewish army "shouted," not doubting but that they should see the predicted event accomplished[c]. In all the instances of faith recorded in this chapter, this is a very prominent feature. Noah believed that he should be saved in the ark: and Abraham believed that Isaac should be restored to him even from the dead.

Thus it is at this day. Faith never questions either the power or veracity of God: it assures itself, that "he is faithful who has promised;" and that what he has promised he is "able also to perform." It is not from *the means* that faith expects the end; but *from God*, in and by the means. The adequacy of the means to the end comes not within its contemplation. If a posterity, innumerable as the stars of heaven, is promised to Abraham and Sarah, they consider not their own advanced age, but believe, that the promise, however improbable according to the course of nature, shall be fulfilled. Though the promise, after it was first given, was deferred for twenty years, they still hold fast their faith, and expect its accomplishment in due season. Thus shall we also, whatever difficulties may arise in our Christian course, expect a successful issue, assured, that "none who come to God through Christ shall ever be cast out," and that "of those whom the Father has given to Christ, not one shall ever be plucked out of his hands." This is the very description which the prophet Isaiah gives of faith as to be exercised under the Christian dispensation: "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God! we have waited for him, and HE WILL SAVE US: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For in this mountain (the Church) shall the hand of the Lord rest; and Moab (the representative of all the Church's enemies) shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill: And he shall spread forth his hands in the midst of them, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth his hands to swim: (*making the very resistance of his enemies the means of advancing his own glory:*) and he shall bring down their pride together with the spoils of their hands: and the fortress of the high fort of thy walls (be they even as strong as those of Jericho,) shall he bring down, lay low, and bring to the ground, even to the dust[d]."]

In

[b] 2 Kin. v. 12. [c] Josh. vi. 20.

[d] Isai. xxv. 9—12. The image of swimming is worthy of particular notice.

In addition to the properties of faith, our text leads us to notice,

II. Its sure effects—

If exercised to the end without wavering, it will surely issue in,

1. The Believer's triumph—

[Down fell the walls of Jericho at the appointed moment, and its garrison became an easy prey to the Jewish army. And what is there which the Believer cannot effect under its influence? "If he have but faith as a grain of mustard-seed, he can remove the most deep-rooted mountains with a word, or plant a sycamore tree in the depths of a tempestuous ocean." Nothing can stand before it. Mountains of guilt, though so high as to reach unto the heavens, are "cast by it into the very depths of the sea[e]." Lusts, though deeply rooted as hell, shall be plucked up[f], and the tender plants of Divine grace have stability, and growth, and fruitfulness amidst all the storms and tempests, whether from without or from within, that can disturb and agitate the soul[g]. Does Satan summon all his forces to withstand its power? He finds the Believer inaccessible to his assaults[h], and is put to flight before him[i]: and in a little time "he shall be bruised under the feet" of the least and weakest of God's people[k]. "All things are possible to him that believeth," because his faith brings down Omnipotence to his aid; so that, though earth and hell combine against him, he sets them at defiance, and is "more than conqueror over all[l]." See this exemplified in the combat of David and Goliah. In the eye of sense, it was impossible for David to succeed: in the eye of faith, it was impossible for him to fail. The issue is well known: the stripling slew the Giant, and cut off his head with his own sword. And so shall the weakest stripling among the soldiers of Christ prevail, making the very weapons of his adversaries the means of advancing and completing his own triumphs.]

2. The glory of God—

[The whole land of Canaan trembled at this event, just as they had before done at the report of all the wonders which had been wrought in Egypt[m]. Had any thing been left for the Jewish army to execute, the glory might, in appearance, have been shared by them: but when nothing but a shout proceeded from them, the work was manifestly the Lord's alone.

And thus it is that God will work in behalf of all who trust in him.

[e] Mic. vii. 19. [f] Rom. vi. 14. Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.
[g] Heb. xiii. 9. 1 Pet. v. 10. [h] Eph. vi. 16. 1 John v. 18.
[i] Jam. iv. 7. [k] Rom. xvi. 20. [l] Rom. viii. 37.
[m] Josh. ii. 10, 11. with vi. 27.

him. He makes our faith the measure of his communications, saying to us, "According to your faith be it done unto you." It is owing to our want of faith that we behold so few manifestations of his power and grace: "He does not many mighty works amongst us because of our unbelief[n]." But where faith is in exercise, he honours it with peculiar approbation, passing by all other graces that are combined with it, and commending faith alone: "O woman, great is thy faith;" "Thy faith hath saved thee; Go in peace[o]." This is the grace which, above all others, honours God; and, as "they who are strongest in faith give most glory to him[p]," so to those who exercise it he will not fail to give the brightest discoveries of his glory: for what he said to Martha, he says to every one of us, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God[q]?" Yes, he does say it, and will fulfil it, not only in the progressive triumphs of his grace, but in the ultimate and everlasting possession of his glory. Men may deride our expectations, as it is probable the men of Jericho, after a few days, did the harmless processions of the Jewish hosts: but God will in due time make bare his arm, and gain himself the glory and the victory.]

We will now endeavour to IMPROVE this subject,

1. In a way of caution—

[Every one imagines that he has faith. But, if we come to inquire into the objects and grounds of men's faith, we find it, for the most part, nothing but presumption. They expect heaven; but not in the way of God's appointment, but in some way of their own, which he has never prescribed. Instead of repenting deeply of their former sins, and fleeing to Christ for refuge, and living in the constant observance of public and private ordinances, according to God's command, they are supine, and careless, as if nothing at all was to be done by them as evidential of their faith. Now I would ask, what would have been the event, if the Jewish army had proceeded on this plan? Suppose they had said, 'We think it absurd to look for the destruction of this fortress by faith alone: we will form a trench round the city, and batter it down with the implements of war:' would they have succeeded? Or suppose they had said, 'We will expect the city to fall, as God has said; but to what purpose are these repeated processions? We shall spare ourselves that fruitless trouble, which will only expose us to the derision of our enemies:' Or suppose they had said, 'We will use the appointed means; but in order to make success doubly sure, we will form a trench, which shall both add to our security, and prevent their escape:' Do we imagine that on any one of these plans they would have been crowned with success? We feel no hesitation in saying, that they would have been disappointed of

[n] Matt. xiii. 58.
[o] Matt. xv. 28. Luke vii. 50.
[p] Rom. iv. 20.
[q] John xi. 40.

of their hope; because they proceeded not according to the commands of God: yea, we doubt not but that the wrath of God would have broke forth against them, as it did on Uzzah, because David in carrying up the Ark was inattentive to the order that Moses had prescribed[r]. Know then that, however confident our expectations of heaven be, they will end in disappointment, if we presume to alter, or neglect, or add to, the means which God himself has ordained. I pray you all to consider this: you especially, who have never yet repented in dust and ashes; you who have never given yourselves to reading, and meditation, and prayer; you who are not yet daily prostrating yourselves at the foot of the cross, and relying on Christ as your only hope; I beseech you to consider, how awfully you delude your own souls, whilst you promise yourselves the enjoyment of the heavenly Canaan. The same too I must say to those, who, whilst they profess to rely on Christ, are making their own works either a joint ground of their hope, or a warrant for their faith in Christ. Your victory can be gained only in the way that it was gained at Jericho: You must use all the means which God has enjoined, without either taking from them or adding to them: but you must expect success from God alone, and be content that he alone be glorified.]

2. In a way of encouragement—

[Many are discouraged because of their own extreme weakness, and because, though they have diligently used the appointed means, they seem not to have advanced at all, or to have any nearer prospects of success. But what if Israel had yielded to such discouragements, and ceased from their labours before their work was done? True it is, that the precise time for the interposition of Jehovah was made known to them; but it is concealed from you: nevertheless it is as much fixed in the Divine counsels with respect to you, as it was to them: and, "in due season you shall surely reap, if you faint not." What if you are unequal to the task; was not the sound of rams' horns, and the shout of the people, weak? Only be content to be weak, and you will then be strong; because "God will perfect his own strength in your weakness." See how God himself chides, yet supports, your fainting mind[s] — — — And see what a frame of mind, though in the midst of all your conflicts, you are privileged to possess[t] — — — Follow then the advice which God himself gives you; and, "though walking in darkness, stay yourselves upon your God." And, if still unbelieving fears arise, chide yourselves, like David, and say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God[u]." In a word, let this saying sink down into your ears, and

[r] 1 Chron. xv. 13. [s] Isai. xlix. 24, 25. [t] Isai. l. 7—9. [u] Ps. xliii. 5,

and animate and sustain your souls; "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his Prophets, so shall ye prosper[x]." Only go on a little longer in a patient continuance in well-doing, and the victory is yours; and glory, and honour, and immortality are yours also.]

[x] 2 Chron. xx. 20.

MCXXIV.

RAHAB CONCEALING THE SPIES.

Heb. xi. 31. *By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*

FAITH is usually considered merely as an assent to testimony; human faith having respect to human testimony, and divine to that which is divine. Hence the subject of faith is supposed to lie within a small compass. But there is not a more comprehensive subject within the whole circle of man's duties: for whilst faith has respect to every thing which God has spoken, it operates in every thing which man does. The chapter before us shews how inexhaustible the subject is. Faith was the one principle by which all the saints there enumerated were influenced: and in every distinct instance its operations were widely different: so that, though in appearance the same subject is brought under discussion, it is presented to us in so different a light as to assume a new character.

In considering the fate of Rahab, we shall be led to shew,

I. To what it had respect—

The whole account of Rahab is contained in the second chapter of Joshua: and to that chapter we must refer as forming the groundwork of this discourse ——— It will there be found, that, though she was an inhabitant of Canaan, and had in her earlier life been notoriously dissolute, she was now a Believer in the God of Israel. What she had heard of him had fully convinced her, that he was the only true God. This she openly avowed to the spies whom she had received: "The Lord your God, he is

is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath[a]." But it was not in a mere general way that she acknowledged Jehovah: she had just and distinct views of him; and had respect to,

1. His purposes as sure—

[She knew that God had "given to Israel the land" of Canaan for their inheritance[b]: and that his purpose respecting it should infallibly be accomplished. As the Creator and Governor of the universe, he had a right to dispose of every thing in it: and, having transferred the land to Israel, he would surely invest them with the possession of it. Thus will true faith present God to our view as a Mighty Sovereign, who orders every thing both in heaven and earth. It will discover him to us as having shewn distinguishing favour to his peculiar people, in that, whilst he has passed by the angels who sinned, and left the greater part of mankind also in utter darkness, he has revealed to *them* a Saviour, yea, and "revealed him *in* them" also as the hope of glory[c]. He has also prepared an inheritance for them from the foundation of the world, even the heavenly Canaan; and called them to take possession of it as his special "gift through the merits and mediation of his Son Jesus Christ[d]." The manner of taking possession of it also he has ordained, even by faith in Christ; by whose blood they shall be justified, and by whose Spirit they shall be renewed. All this will faith regard as unalterably fixed in the Divine counsels; so that those who possess the first-fruits here, shall infallibly reap the harvest of salvation in a better world[e].]

2. His perfections as unbounded—

[Whilst she was convinced that his power was irresistible, she, though of an accursed race and of an abandoned character, had no doubt but that God's mercy would extend even to her, if she sought it with her whole heart. Hence of her own accord she received, and hid, the spies, and dismissed them in peace, in hopes that she and her family might be spared: and all the security she required was, an oath in Jehovah's name, that no evil should be inflicted on her, when the threatened vengeance should be poured out on all beside. And is she not here also an example to us? Yes: by faith we must survey him in all his glorious perfections: we must view him as a God of all grace, whose mercy is infinite; who delights in the exercise of mercy; who "waits to be gracious" to the very chief of sinners, "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," and following them with this tender expostulation, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O House of Israel?" "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he

[a] Josh. ii. 11. [b] ver. 9. [c] Gal. i. 16.
[d] Rom. vi. 23. [e] 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

he should turn from his wickedness and live." To this our faith should have especial respect; because it is our great encouragement to seek his face. To know that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin;" that "whosoever cometh to God by him shall be in no wise cast out;" and that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound;" to know this, I say, and to realize it by faith, is the richest consolation which a broken-hearted sinner can enjoy. At the same time we should, like her, assure ourselves that "God's counsels shall stand, and that he will do all his will:" we should bear in mind the records of his former interpositions, and from them be convinced that "there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord[f]." *Theoretically* indeed we do acknowledge this: but how few feel it practically! How few are so impressed with the idea as to despair of escaping his wrath, but by casting away the weapons of their rebellion, and laying hold on his proffered mercy!]

But this part of our subject will come more properly before us, whilst, in our further investigation of her faith, we shew,

II. How it operated—

From the instance to which the text directs our attention, we see, that it operated in a way,

1. Of holy fear—

[Rahab did not merely participate the terror which had seized all the inhabitants of Jericho, a terror that served only to harden their hearts, but a fear associated with a consciousness of her demerits, and a determination to seek for mercy. And, till this is wrought within us, there is no true faith in our souls. The very first work of the Holy Spirit is "to convince us of our sins;" to shew us our desert and danger; to make us sensible that "we are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Till we are brought to the condition of those on the day of Pentecost, who "were pricked to the heart," and with a deep sense of their guilt and misery cried out, "Men and brethren, What shall we do?" there is nothing done effectually towards our conversion to God, nothing that can give any hope of the salvation of our souls.]

2. Of intense desire—

[Her desire of mercy swallowed up every other consideration. She forgot all which passes under the name of patriotism, conceiving that she had a prior and a paramount duty to the God of Israel. So sure was she that God's purposes should be fulfilled, that she did not for a moment imagine that any efforts of hers to destroy the spies would at all avail for the protection of her countrymen.

[f] Prov. xxi. 30.

trymen. She saw that this was an opportunity afforded her for the preservation of her soul; and, if she let it pass unimproved, she should only involve herself in the ruin that could not possibly be averted. She therefore sided with Jehovah and his people against those who were related to her according to the flesh; and determined at the risk of her life to cast in her lot with the people of the Lord. Thus should we also postpone every consideration under heaven to the honour of God and the salvation of our souls. The love of our country is confessedly an important duty, as the love of our parents also is: but when our duty to God stands in opposition to the wishes or interests of our earthly superiors, the line of duty plainly is to serve God at all events. The direction given to the Church under the character of a spouse, is this: "Hearken, O daughter, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King have pleasure in thy beauty: for he is thy Lord God: and worship thou HIM[g]." Our Lord's declaration to his followers is plainer still: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple[h]." The kingdom of heaven is a pearl, for which faith will part with all in order to possess it.]

3. Of unreserved obedience—

[Every direction that was given her she readily complied with; and in no instance departed from the terms on which alone she was encouraged to expect mercy. Nor will any one who truly believes that he shall be an object of sparing mercy, account "any of God's commandments grievous." His determination through grace will be to be found in God's appointed way, fulfilling all righteousness, and "walking in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord blameless." One particular commandment given to her I will here notice as of more than ordinary importance, namely, that of binding the scarlet line in her window, as the memorial of her faith, and the means of her preservation. Had this been neglected, she had perished with the rest of her countrymen: but by this her safety was secured. There is a corresponding command given to every one that desires to obtain mercy, which above all he will be anxious to obey, namely, that of believing in Christ[i], and "abiding in him," as the branch abides in the vine[k]. Faith will teach him, that, if he be not found in Christ, the sword of Divine vengeance will surely cut him off, as that of the destroying angel did the first-born, whose doors were not sprinkled with the blood of the Paschal Lamb. In a word, as soon as true faith is formed in the soul, the

[g] Ps. xlv. 10, 11. [h] Luke xiv. 26. [i] 1 John iii. 23.
[k] John xv. 4—7. The injunction to abide in him is repeated *four times.*

the one inquiry will be, "Lord, what will thou have me to do[l]?" and from that time the Believer's desire will be to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."]

In the account given of her faith, we see,

III. What it obtained—

1. A deliverance from that destruction which came on all her unbelieving neighbours—

[In Jericho nothing that breathed was left alive, with the exception of Rahab and her family: but to them the promised mercy was vouchsafed. And who that believes in Christ shall perish? Against the unbelieving world the deluge of God's wrath will prevail, and sink them all without exception into everlasting perdition: but to those who are in Christ, no evil shall accrue. They are in the true ark, against which the winds and waves shall beat in vain. In the great day of the Lord, there will be a separation made between the sheep and the goats; nor shall one of either flock be found through any mistake confounded with those whose nature so widely differs from his own: not a lamb shall be found amongst the goats; nor a kid amongst the sheep: but each will have the portion assigned him by the Judge of all, the Unbelievers in the lake of fire and brimstone; the Believers in the regions of eternal bliss. Amongst "the chaff that shall then be burnt up with unquenchable fire," not the smallest grain of wheat shall be found[m].]

2. A portion amongst the chosen people of the Lord—

[This is particularly noticed in the subsequent history of Rahab: she was incorporated with Israel, and made a partaker of all their privileges[n]. So, though we have been aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, we shall be made nigh by the blood of Christ, as soon as we believe in him; and from being "strangers and foreigners shall become fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God[o]." Look through the holy Scriptures, and see all that belongs to the saints, either in this world or the next, and you will read only the catalogue of your own possessions: for "all things are yours, when ye are Christ's[p]."]

3. The transcendent honour of being brought into the nearest relation to Christ himself—

[Who would have thought that this poor Canaanite, of an accursed nation, and once of an abandoned character, should be chosen

[l] Acts ix. 6. [m] Am. ix. 9. [n] Josh. vi. 25.
[o] Eph. ii. 12, 13, 19. [p] 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

chosen of God to be an instrument of bringing into the world the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world? Yet so it was: Salmon, one of the progenitors of Christ, married her: and their son Boaz married Ruth, the Moabitess, from whom descended in an immediate line Obed, Jesse, David. And will the parallel hold good here also? Shall we, on believing in Christ, become thus intimately united with him? Yes, and far more intimately, for she, *as his ancestor*, was one with him only *corporeally*; whereas by faith we become "one *Spirit* with him[q]." As relating to the flesh, we are no nearer to him than others; but as relating to the Spirit, "we are members of his body, even of his flesh and of his bones[r]."]

From this subject then we LEARN,

1. How sovereign God is in the dispensation of his gifts!

[Of all that were in Jericho, we read not of any to whom true faith was given. Others, like the devils, believed, and trembled: she alone "believed unto righteousness." It is pleasing to reflect, that, amongst the most avowed enemies of God and his Christ, there may be some hidden ones, whose heart God has touched with true repentance, though their views of salvation be very indistinct; and who shall be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, whilst millions, who have enjoyed the brighter light of the Gospel, will be cast out into outer darkness. It is a rich consolation also to know, that the most abandoned sinner in the universe is not beyond the reach of mercy; but that, as God's grace is his own, and he divides to every one severally as he will, we may all without exception look to him for mercy with a full confidence of acceptance through the Son of his love. Let any one that is discouraged through a sense of his own unworthiness, remember Rahab, and, like her, cast himself upon the mercy of the God of Israel.]

2. How certainly faith shall avail for the salvation of the soul!

[We are told by St. James, that "Rahab was justified by her works[s]." But can any one suppose that the mere act of receiving the spies, and dismissing them in peace, formed her justifying righteousness before God? Assuredly not: for it was attended with great infirmity, seeing that she had recourse to falsehood to conceal her conduct, because she knew not how to trust in God to protect her from the consequences of it[t]. But, imperfect as her works were, they evinced the sincerity of her faith, and proved her to be indeed in a justified state before God. If then a faith, so obscure as her's was, and so imperfect in its actings, justified

[q] 1 Cor. vi. 17. [r] Eph. v. 30. [s] Jam. ii. 25. [t] Josh. ii. 4—6.

justified her before God, let no one doubt but that a full affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ shall assuredly bring him into a state of acceptance with God, and ultimately prevail for the salvation of his soul.]

3. How certainly faith will also be productive of good works!

[It is in confirmation of this sentiment that St. James adduces the examples of Abraham and of Rahab as justified by their works. He is shewing that faith without works is dead; and that their works proved them to be possessed of a living faith. Undoubtedly her faith was, as we have before observed, not very distinct, though we doubt not but that it was afterwards enlarged, as her knowledge of the Mosaic writings increased. But indistinct as it was, it wrought, and powerfully too, yea, so powerfully as to overbalance every other consideration that could operate upon her mind. And thus it will do in every one: it will work, and effectually too, to overcome the world[u], and purify the heart[x]. If then it do not evidence itself by such fruits as these, let us not imagine that we are possessed of it: if it work not thus, our faith is no better than the faith of devils. Whoever then professes to be interested in "the grace of God which bringeth salvation," let him learn from it, what it invariably teaches to all who have received it, "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world[y]." If any have this hope in him, let him walk as Christ walked, and "purify himself even as he is pure[z]."]

[u] 1 John v. 4. [x] Acts xv. 9.
[y] Tit. ii. 11, 12. [z] 1 John ii. 6. & iii. 3.

MCXXV.

GOD'S ESTIMATE OF HIS PEOPLE.

Heb. xi. 38. *Of whom the world was not worthy.*

THESE words are introduced in a parenthesis; and are intended to obviate an objection, which might weaken, if not make void, the foregoing statement. The Apostle has been insisting upon the operations and fruits of faith; and has adduced a great variety of instances in which its power has been displayed.

Those who wrought such stupendous works by the power of faith might be supposed to be objects of high and deserved admiration; but those who suffered

fered so many things under its influence might be thought to have merited their afflictions: whereas, in truth, the world itself, even that very world by which they were so persecuted, was not worthy of them.

Let us consider,

I. God's record concerning them—

It is obvious that there is an immense difference between God's estimation of his people, and that in which they are held by an ignorant and ungodly world.

The world accounts the saints unworthy of it.—

[This appears from the manner in which the world uniformly treats the saints. In the days referred to by the Apostle, multitudes of the saints were tortured on account of their piety; many "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth[a]." And these are the persons to whom this testimony is given, that "the world was not worthy of them."

In the days of Christ and his Apostles, the same enmity against vital godliness betrayed itself continually. Our blessed Lord, though confessedly without spot or blemish, was "despised and rejected of men:" his whole "nation abhorred him," and combined to demand his crucifixion; preferring even a murderer before him. His Apostles too, as he himself had forewarned them, were "hated of all men for his sake," and were counted as "the filth of the earth and the off-scouring of all things," precisely as the godly in the days of Jeremiah had been before them[b]. St. Paul was certainly not behind any in wisdom or piety; yet of him was it said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live[c]."

And is it not thus at this time also? *I appeal to all*, Whether the very circumstance of a person being zealously devoted to the service of his God do not uniformly bring a stigma upon his character, so that, even though he should be the most active, and benevolent, and blameless of mankind, he will be regarded as weak and noxious in that particular? If from peculiar circumstances a man of piety be led to take a prominent part in the diffusion of true religion, I ask, Will not the world account him unworthy of

[a] ver. 35—38. [b] Compare Lam. iii. 45. with 1 Cor. iv. 13.
[c] Acts xxii. 22.

of their esteem, their company, their protection? Let the opprobrious names which are given to such characters, and the contempt with which they are treated, and the injuries which with impunity are inflicted on them, determine this point. He can know little either of the sentiments or conduct of those around him, who does not see, that at this hour, no less than in former times, "they who are born after the flesh prosecute those who are born after the Spirit;" and that "the enmity of the serpent's Seed against the Seed of the woman" is as strong as ever.

But, whilst the world thus accounts the saints unworthy of it,]

God, on the other hand, pronounces the world unworthy of them—

[God regards the saints as "his peculiar treasure above all people upon the face of the earth." In his estimation they are as lights in a dark world, and as "salt" which keeps the great mass of the ungodly from utter putrefaction[d]. Nay further, he sends them as leaven to diffuse piety all around them[e], and to impart to others the blessings which they themselves have received. But the world is unworthy of them: for they know not their value; and are regardless of all the advantages which they might derive from them; yea, they are insensible of the benefits which they are daily receiving from them; and they requite all their kindness with nothing but hatred and contempt.

We have not time to enter minutely into these different particulars: yet we must not pass them over without a few words to elucidate and confirm them. Go back to the days of the Apostles: see in what light those distinguished servants of God were regarded: see at what a low rate all their labours were appreciated in every city, not of Judea only, but of the whole world. What benefits might the people in every place have received, if they would have listened to the instructions and followed the examples of those holy men! So at this day might they be benefited by the saints and ministers of the Lord, so far at least as those saints and ministers are themselves conformed to the doctrines and examples of the primitive saints. Indeed the world is, though unwittingly, benefited by the saints in a very high degree: for by them the tone of morals is raised, wherever they come: and a multitude of institutions for the temporal and spiritual welfare of mankind are set on foot; institutions which would never have been carried forward, if the zeal and piety of the godly had not led the way, and the envy and jealousy of the careless been provoked to tread in their steps[f]. How far the words of our Lord respecting Jerusalem

[d] Matt. v. 13, 14. [e] Matt. xiii. 33.

[f] The Societies for the Diffusion of the Holy Scriptures, for sending forth Missions to the Heathen, for the Conversion of Jews to Christianity, and for the Education of the Poor, abundantly illustrate this truth.

Jerusalem are applicable to the present day, I pretend not to say: but in that day, the tribulation that came on Jerusalem was greater than had existed since the beginning of the world, insomuch that "if those days of trouble had not been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake those days were shortened[g]." And if only ten righteous men had been found in Sodom, both that city, and all the other cities of the plain, would have been spared. Who can tell then what judgments would be poured out upon the ungodly world, if the saints by their piety and their prayers did not stay the hand of an avenging God[h]? But how these benefits are requited, it is needless to observe. Suffice it to say, that God's estimation of his saints is the same as ever; and his declaration concerning them is, that "the world is not worthy of them."]

Let us then proceed to state,

II. The sentiments with which this record should inspire us—

It should teach us,

1. To disregard the indignities that are cast upon us—

[Man has his "*day*:" but God has his also: and in the prospect of the ultimate decision of an infallible Judge, it should be a small matter to us to be judged of man's judgment[i]. When men pour contempt upon us, we should say as our blessed Lord, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." In reference to the persecutors of that immaculate Lamb, the Apostle says, that "through ignorance they persecuted him," and that, "if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." So, if men really knew what God has done for his chosen people, and how "precious their blood is in his sight," they would not venture to oppose them in the way they do. Men are beguiled by their own prejudices: they persuade themselves that piety is hypocrisy; and that, to diffuse it, is to "turn the world upside down:" and, in opposing it, "they think they really do God service." Towards them therefore we should feel pity, rather than resentment: and on our own account we should feel nothing but exceeding joy; since we only participate the lot of God's chosen people[k], and are rendered conformable to the example of Christ himself[l].]

2. To adore and magnify our God, who has so distinguished us—

[Who is it that has made any of us to differ from the world around us[m]? Verily, "he that hath wrought us to the self-same thing

[g] Matt. xxiv. 21, 22. [h] Gen. xix. 22. [i] 1 Cor. iv. 3. The Greek.
[k] Matt. v. 11, 12. [l] 1 Pet. iv. 13. [m] 1 Cor. iv. 7.

thing is God[n]." In ourselves we were no better than others: we were "dead in trespasses and sins," like all around us; and were "children of wrath, even as others." But he pitied us; "he looked upon us whilst lying in our blood, and bade us live[o]." O how should we bless and adore him for such amazing love! "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the Sons of God[p]." Let us enter into the full spirit of these words of the loving and beloved Apostle: and let us never cease to call on "all that is within us to bless" and magnify our adorable Benefactor[q].]

3. To walk worthy of our high and heavenly calling—

["What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!" Has God called us to glory and virtue? has he made us "a peculiar people on purpose that we should shew forth both the praises and the virtues of him that has called us[r]?" Let us then "walk as becometh saints," and "walk as becometh the Gospel of Christ." If we profess to have received such mercies at the Lord's hands, the world have a right to expect that we should surpass them as much in real excellence, as we do in the privileges of which we make our boast. "What do ye more than others?" is a question which they have a right to ask, and to which we ought to be able to return a satisfactory answer. Yea, our very lives should supersede the necessity of a verbal answer; we should be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men." If indeed the world be not worthy of us, let them see their inferiority by our lives; and be constrained from what they behold in us to acknowledge, that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour." If the difference between them and us be so immense as the Apostle represents it to be[s], let us labour to comply with his direction, and to shine before them with all the splendor of a holy people[t].]

4. To exert ourselves in bringing others to a participation of the benefits which we enjoy—

["Our light is not to be put under a bed, or under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that all around us may receive the benefit." The importance of this in relation to the blessings of civilization is generally acknowledged: and is it less important in reference to the blessings of salvation? Let every one of us then say with the Church of old, "Draw *me*, and we will come after thee;" that is, if God draw *me*, I will not come alone, but will draw all I can along with me. If men despise our efforts, and shew

[n] 2 Cor. v. 5. [o] Ezek. xvi. 5, 6. [p] 1 John iii. 1.
[q] Ps. ciii. 1—3. [r] 1 Pet. ii. 9. The Greek. [s] 2 Cor. vi. 14—18.
[t] Phil. ii. 14, 15. This passage must be particularly marked.

shew an utter disregard of the blessings which we hold out to them, let it only stir us up to augmented zeal, and plead with us the more powerfully to exert ourselves the more in their behalf. Let us expostulate with them, as the Prophet does, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." And then, if they requite your labours only with hatred and persecution, determine through grace, that you "will gladly spend and be spent for them, though the more abundantly you love them, the less you be loved."]

MCXXVI.

THE ADVANTAGES ENJOYED UNDER THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

Heb. xi. 39, 40. *These all having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*

WHEN we hear or read of the saints of old, we excuse our want of resemblance to them, from the idea that they were more highly favored than we; and that it would be unreasonable to expect from us of these later days, such high attainments as they made by reason of their peculiar and more exalted dispensation. But this excuse is altogether founded on a mistake: for the disparity between their dispensation and ours is altogether in our favour, as we are expressly told in the passage before us; which will naturally lead me to shew,

I. What good things God vouchsafed to his people of old—

God has been gracious to his people in every age:

1. He gave them exceeding great and precious promises—

[The promise given to Adam in Paradise was gradually unfolded by successive revelations, till there was such a body of prophecy as exhibited the Saviour with the utmost possible precision. His person, work, and offices were all set forth so minutely; that, if the detached prophecies were collected and arranged, there

there would be found in the Old Testament as just a Representation of him as in the Gospel itself. These formed a ground of hope to the Lord's people, who were thus instructed to look to their Messiah as "their Prophet, like unto Moses," to instruct them; their Priest, after the order of Melchizedec, to make atonement for them; and their King, who, sitting as on David's throne, should reign over them, and in them, for evermore.]

2. He enabled them to live by faith upon these promises—

[Faith, in whomsoever it is found, is the gift of God: And it was richly bestowed on many, as appears from the chapter before us. We are even astonished at the strength with which it was exercised in many instances, and at the realizing views which it gave of invisible things to those in whom it was found. The instances recorded of it are still the brightest patterns for the imitation of the Christian Church[a]———]

3. He testified his acceptance of their faith so exercised—

[This is noticed in the beginning of this chapter, and again repeated at the close of it[b]. God testified his acceptance of their faith by invariably accomplishing those objects which he had encouraged them to expect, so that in no single instance was any one Believer ever disappointed of his hope. However hopeless or even impossible the events might appear according to the judgment of man, every difficulty vanished, and every expectation was fulfilled, as soon as ever the faith of his people had been sufficiently tried, and the time for God's interposition was arrived. He further testified his acceptance of it by the witness of his Spirit in their souls. There can be no doubt but that they enjoyed in their souls a peace flowing from their affiance in God, and a sense of his love shed abroad in their hearts, together with an assurance of his approbation in the day of judgment. This appears from their "looking for a city which hath foundations, and a heavenly country," as "the recompence of their reward;" and from their refusing deliverance from present trials in full expectation of "a better resurrection" to life eternal. And what a testimony has he given in the record which is contained in this chapter; a record which will transmit their names with honour to the end of time!]

But, that we may form a just estimate of our blessings, I will proceed to shew,

II. What

[a] Reference may here be made to two or three of those contained in the preceding context.

[b] ver. 2. with the text. See the Greek.

II. What "better thing he has provided for us" under the Christian dispensation—

Certainly our privileges are far superior to theirs: for,

1. We have in possession that Saviour whom they only looked forward to in the promise—

[The first advent of Christ was held forth to them as an object of faith and hope, just as his second advent is to us. But the promise relating to that is now fulfilled. We have seen him accomplishing every prophecy, and performing in himself all that was shadowed forth in the infinitely diversified types of the ceremonial law: and we have, in this very circumstance, such a proof of his Messiahship, as no considerate and candid person can withstand. We have heard all his gracious instructions relative to the way of life; and have already seen his kingdom established in the world. We have seen "the stone that was cut out without hands, becoming a mountain, and filling the whole earth."

What an unspeakable advantage is this! If Abraham rejoiced when he saw only by faith, and very indistinctly, the days of the Son of man, what reason have we to rejoice in having this adorable Saviour fully revealed in all his beauty, and excellency, and glory! Well does our Lord himself congratulate his believing people, saying, "Blessed are your eyes which see the things which ye see, and hear the things which ye hear[b]."]

2. We have in perfection those blessings which they enjoyed only in their commencement—

[They knew not what solid peace was: their sacrifices, however rich and abundant, could not impart this blessing: they were rather "remembrances of sin," than real expiations; and "could make no man perfect as pertaining to the conscience." "The law made nothing perfect; but the bringing in of a better hope did[c]." Their access to God was that only of a servant, who keeps at a distance: ours is that of a child, who comes to the very bosom of his father[d]. Their communications from him were as darkness, in comparison of the light which we enjoy[e]. The Prophets themselves did not understand their own prophecies, as we do[f]. Not even John the Baptist, who pointed out Jesus as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world," had such just conceptions of him, as we have: in this respect "even the least Believer that is to be found in all the kingdom of God, is greater than he." All, not excepting even the Apostles themselves, till the day of Pentecost, had a veil upon their hearts, so that they could not behold the glory of God in the face

[b] Luke xiv. 23, 24. [c] Heb. vii. 19. [d] Eph. iii. 12.
[e] 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10. 1 John ii. 8. [f] 1 Pet. i. 12.

face of their Divine Master: "but we, with open and unveiled face, behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, and are changed by it into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord[g]."]

In the view of these glorious advantages, I would yet further DRAW YOUR ATTENTION to them in a way,

1. Of solemn inquiry—

[*What report does God, and what report does conscience, give respecting us?* Are we walking in the footsteps of the saints of old, even of those saints, who "by faith obtained a good report?" We are not to imagine that, whilst faith wrought so powerfully in them, it will have no visible influence on *us?* Be assured, that its operation is the same in all ages. Let me then ask, What effects it has wrought in *you?* Take the examples of Noah, of Abraham, and of Moses, *as set forth in the preceding part of the chapter,* and see what resemblance you bear to them — — — How inferior to them are we in our practice, notwithstanding the superiority of our advantages! — — — Have we not reason to blush and be ashamed at a review of our past lives, and at our misimprovement of the advantages which we enjoy? — —]

2. Of affectionate admonition—

[*If ever you would "be made perfect," you must both live by faith,* and "die in the faith." To be "walking by sight, when you should walk by faith only," will surely bring you to a far different end from that which you desire and expect. Oh! "listen not to flesh and blood;" but obey unfeignedly, and without reserve, the commandments of your God. Set before you the invisible God, who marks all your ways, and tries your very reins and your heart. Set before you also the invisible realities of the eternal world, the glories of heaven and the miseries of hell; and consider which of them is the portion prepared for you. What a lamentable thing will it be in the day of judgment to see such an one as Rahab, an accursed Canaanite and an harlot, admitted into the kingdom of heaven, and you yourselves cast out! I pray you avail yourselves of the advantages which you enjoy; and let them not issue in your heavier condemnation. The promise of Christ's coming to *judge* the world will as surely be fulfilled, as that of his coming to *save* the world has been. And if you look forward to that event, and to the everlasting separation of the righteous from the wicked, O think "what manner of persons ye ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness;" and "be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." — — —]

[g] 2 Cor. iii. 18.

MCXXVII.

AFFLICTIONS THE FRUIT OF GOD'S LOVE.

Heb. xii. 4—13. *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But, if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: Nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees: and make strait paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.*

PERSECUTION for righteousness' sake is what every Child of God must expect: and when faith is in lively exercise, it will be sustained without murmuring. This is amply shewn in the preceding chapter[a]. But when faith languishes, the trials which Believers are called to endure will appear almost insupportable. Such was the state of many of the Hebrews to whom the Apostle wrote: they were in danger of becoming weary and faint in their minds through the greatness and long continuance of their sufferings. On this account, St. Paul, having shewn them the power of a living faith to support them, brings before them a variety of considerations;

I. For their consolation and support—

The patience of Christ under his sufferings is beyond all comparison the strongest incentive to resignation under ours; since ours fall so infinitely short of

[a] Ch. xi. 35—38.

of his. This the Apostle first propounds for their consideration; and then goes on, in the words which we have just read, to offer other suggestions, which also are of great weight for the reconciling of the mind to trials, of whatever kind they be. From them, we also, when bowed down with affliction, may learn to support them manfully: for,

1. They are far less than we have pledged ourselves willingly to endure—

[The very terms on which we come to Christ are, that we shall be ready to die for him at any time, and in any way, that he shall see fit. We are plainly warned by our Lord himself, that, if we will not lay down our life for him, we cannot be his disciples. "If we love our lives, we shall lose them: but, if we lose them for his sake, then shall we find them to life eternal." But, What is the loss of temporal good when compared with that of life? Be it granted that, like the Hebrews, we have suffered much[b]: yet our persecutors have stopped far short of what they might have inflicted; and may, for ought we know, be yet permitted to inflict: "We have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." Instead therefore of complaining of the heaviness of our trials, we have reason rather to be thankful for the lightness of them: and, if we faint when they are so light, how shall we support them when they come upon us with unrestrained force? "If we have run with footmen and they wearied us, how shall we contend with horses[c]?" In our "strivings then against sin" and Satan, let us prepare for yet greater extremities: and, when we are prepared for the worst that can come upon us, then will all which stop short of that appear light and easy to be borne.]

2. They are all the fruits of paternal love—

[God had exhorted his people under the Old Testament dispensation to regard their trials in this view, as sent by a loving Father to his children; and to receive them with truly filial gratitude, "neither despising them," as though they came only by chance, "nor fainting under them," as though they had been sent in anger[d]. And the Apostle fixes our attention particularly on the tender and affectionate terms under which our God addresses us; "*My Son*, despise not." And we should not overlook such endearing expressions, which, if duly attended to, would reconcile us even to the most afflictive dispensations. The truth is, that *man* is only an instrument in God's hands: and that the very afflictions which men lay upon us for our *excess* of piety,

[b] Ch. x. 32—34. [c] Jer. xii. 5. [d] Prov. iii. 11, 12.

piety, God lays upon us for our *defects*, or for the further advancement of his work within us. St. Paul's thorn in the flesh was ordained of God to prevent his being too much elated by the revelations which had been vouchsafed unto him[e]. Our state in this world is a state of discipline: we are yet children, and need correction on account of our manifold errors and faults: and it is by correction that we are gradually brought to the exercise of true wisdom. This is found universally amongst men; insomuch that there is no wise father who does not occasionally correct his child. A man, who sees children that are unconnected with him acting amiss, takes no notice of them, but leaves to others the painful office of correcting them: but his own children he corrects, because of his peculiar interest in them, and his love towards them. Would we then that God should disregard us as bastards, that have no real relation to him? Would we not much rather be dealt with by him as his beloved children, in whose welfare he takes the deepest interest? Whatever then be our affliction, corporeal or mental, personal or domestic; or with whatever view it may be inflicted on us by others, let us view the hand of a Father in it, and say, with Eli, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good[f]." Let us "hear the rod, and him who appointed it[g];" and endeavour to make a just improvement of it for the good of our souls.]

3. If we have submitted patiently to the rebukes of our earthly parents, much more should we to those of our heavenly Father—

[Earthly parents do not always correct so justly or so temperately as they ought; their rebukes being sometimes little else than an ebullition of their own evil tempers: yet we have submitted to their corrections without presuming to arraign the wisdom, the justice, or the love that inflicted the chastisement upon us. This is a part of that honour which children were by God's law enjoined to pay those who were the fathers of *their flesh*; and which, if they obstinately refused to pay, they were by God's own appointment to be stoned to death[h]. But this submission is due in an infinitely higher degree to Him who is the Father of *our spirits*: and, if we refuse it to him, a far worse death assuredly awaits us in the world to come; for he never inflicts any evil upon us but for our greater good, even that we may become in a greater degree "partakers of his holiness." On the other hand, to obedient children there was a peculiar promise of a long and happy life; a promise doubtless fulfilled to multitudes in former times, and not unfrequently accomplished now. But to those who meekly submit to the Divine chastisements, it shall be fulfilled in the Canaan that is above, even in the regions of blessedness

[e] 2 Cor. xii. 7.
[f] 1 Sam. iii. 18.
[g] Mic. vi. 9.
[h] Deut. xxi. 18—21.

ness and glory for evermore. Shall we then refuse to the corrections of our heavenly Father that submission which we paid to our earthly parents? "Shall we not much rather be in subjection to him, and *live?*" Surely this is our truest wisdom, and our highest privilege.]

4. Our sufferings, how grievous soever they may appear at the time, are all sent for our eternal good—

[Whilst we have the feelings of humanity, chastening, of whatever kind it be, cannot but be grievous to us at the time: But after it has produced its proper effects, "it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." [l] At first, tribulation works *im*patience: but, when the soul has been well disciplined by a continuance or recurrence of it, a better temper is produced; and, through the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit upon the soul, a different process is produced; and "tribulation worketh *patience*, and patience experience, and experience hope; even a hope that maketh not ashamed[k]." Now shall we complain of dispensations which are sent for such an end? Shall the vine complain of the pruning knife, which cuts only with a view to increase its fruitfulness? Shall the vessel complain of the furnace into which it is put in order to effect its meetness for the Master's use? Let us then look to *the end;* and we shall never repine at the means which Infinite Wisdom has ordained for the attainment of it. If we be "in heaviness through manifold temptations, let us not forget that there is a fit occasion for them; and that the trial of our faith, which is infinitely more precious than that which purifies the gold, will be found to the praise and honour and glory of our God, and to our own also, at the appearing of Jesus Christ[k]." If we be "made partakers of his holiness," we shall never complain of the means which were used to bring us to the attainment of it.]

5. Walk so as to encourage others by your example—

[The influence of example is far greater than we are ready to imagine. Peter, in order to avoid the displeasure of the Judaizing Christians, had recourse to dissimulation. (Here I may observe that if an Apostle swerved so grievously from the path of duty, through his carnal reasonings, who has not reason to take heed lest he also fall?) And what effect had this on others? "The whole Church dissembled with him; insomuch that even Barnabas himself was carried away with their dissimulation[m]." On the other hand, see the effect of good example in the apostle Paul. He was imprisoned for the truth's sake, and retained his fidelity undaunted, and undiminished; insomuch that

[l] Rom. v. 3—5. [k] 1 Pet. i. 6, 7. [m] Gal. ii. 13, 14.

that "his bonds for Christ's sake became a matter of notoriety through Cesar's palace, and in all other places." And what was the effect of this? We are told, that "Many of the Brethren in the Lord *waxing confident by his bonds*," and by what they heard of his fortitude in supporting them, "were much more bold to speak the word without fear," so that "the Gospel was furthered" by the very means which its enemies used to obstruct its progress[z]. Similar effects will, in a greater or less degree, follow from our conduct under our afflictions. There are in every place many who may be considered as "lame," who will be stumbled and weakened, and discouraged, if they see us faint; whilst, on the other hand, they will be encouraged and emboldened to go forward, if they behold us adhering resolutely to the path of duty, and supporting manfully the trials which are come upon us. Let us then think of the probable effect of our conduct upon those around us: let us think how much good or evil we may do, according as we approve ourselves to God, or not, in the discharge of our duty. There is a high line which we should pursue, even that which the Apostle prayed for in behalf of the Colossians, to be "strengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power—unto all patience, and long-suffering, with joyfulness—giving thanks unto the Father who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light[a]." And think not that such an aim as this would betray any arrogance in you: for Timothy was but a youth, and yet was directed to be an example, not to the world only, but to Believers also, in every thing that was good[b]: and it is the duty of every one, whether a Minister or not, "so to let his light shine before men, that all who behold it may be led to glorify their Father which is in heaven[c]." In a word, let us all endeavour so to walk, that we may say with the apostle Paul, "Whatsoever ye have heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you[d]."]

The Apostle having instructed the Hebrews in the true nature and end of their sufferings, suggests some further considerations,

II. For their direction and guidance—

These also we shall consider as addressed to us; and in correspondence with them we would say to all sufferers of the present day,

1. Yield not to dejection—

[Troubles, whether felt or feared, are apt to depress the spirits, and to enervate the whole man. This we see depicted in strong

[z] Phil. i. 12—14. [a] Col. i. 10—13. [b] 1 Tim. iv. 12.
[c] Matt. v. 16. [d] Col. iv. 9.

strong colours in the prophet Ezekiel. "Sigh," says God to him, "Sigh, thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins, and with bitterness sigh before their eyes. And it shall be, when they say unto thee, Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings: because it cometh: and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water[e]." But it should not be thus with us, whatever be the trials with which we have been visited, or with which we may be menaced: for they all are ordered by a wise and gracious God, who controuls and limits all according to his own sovereign will, and without whose permission not a hair of our head can be touched. Our enemies, unconscious of their dependence on him, plot and threaten our destruction. But see what the Psalmist says concerning them: "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth: but the Lord shall laugh at him[f]," as a poor, impotent, and malignant worm, that exists only through his forbearance and tender mercy. Now, I ask, shall *God laugh* at him, and *we cry?* Shall we not rather set the poor impotent worm at defiance? But see what the Psalmist further adds: "The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation." And what is the issue of all this? "Their sword shall enter into *their own* heart, and their *bows* shall be *broken*[g]." "Say ye not then, A confederacy, like those who are crying out, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid: but sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself; and let *him* be your fear, and let *him* be your dread: and he shall be to you for a sanctuary[h]." And when others would alarm you with the supposed power of your persecutors, let your answer be, "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven[i]." The greatest of all your adversaries, even Satan himself, could not so much as enter into the swine without permission: how then shall he, or any of his confederates, hurt a Child of God without permission[k]? You may laugh them all to scorn, and shake your head at them[l]: for, with God on your side, there are a million times "more for you than against you." Only "be strong in the Lord[m]," and you will be more than conqueror over all.]

2. Swerve not from the path of duty—

[Fear, and unbelief, and impatience "will make our ways crooked[n]:" and the contrivances to which under their influence we shall have recourse for the purpose of avoiding difficulties, will augment our difficulties an hundred-fold. The way to "make strait paths for our feet," is simply to fulfil the will of God, and leave

[e] Ezek. xxi. 7. [f] Ps. xxxvii. 12, 13. [g] ib. ver. 14, 15.
[h] Isai. viii. 12—14. [i] Ps. xi. 1—4. [k] 1 Pet. iii. 13.
[l] Isai. xxxvii. 22. [m] Eph. vi. 10. [n] Isai. lix. 8.

leave events to him. If Daniel and the Hebrew Youths had set themselves to consider how they might avoid the trials with which they were threatened, they might have attained their end, it is true; but they would have involved their souls in the deepest guilt. They followed the strait-forward path: not moving to the right hand nor to the left, to avoid the fiery furnace, or a den of lions. This was right ——— And this is the very direction given to us also by God himself: "Ponder the path of thy feet; and let all thy ways be established: Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; remove thy feet from evil[o]." Adopt this then as the principle from which no consideration under heaven shall induce you to depart; "I must obey my God:" and, if the whole world combine to divert you from it, let your reply be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." This will deliver you from endless perplexity. This will make your every path both clear and strait. "If your eye be evil," and the film of carnal hopes or fears be upon it, "your whole body will be full of darkness:" but "if your eye be single," and you have no purpose but to serve and honour God, "your whole body will be full of light[p]," and your steps be directed in a way wherein you shall neither err, nor stumble.]

[o] Prov. iv. 26, 27. [p] Matt. vi. 22, 23.

MCXXVIII.

THE DANGER OF DESPISING OR DISHONOURING THE GOSPEL.

Heb. xii. 15—17. *Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled: lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birth-right. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.*

UNSEARCHABLE are the riches of the Gospel, and freely imparted to all who seek them by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet they quite mistake the nature of the Gospel, who imagine it to be inconsistent with solemn warnings. It offers every thing freely; but it does not dispense with the exertion of human efforts: it promises every thing fully; but not in such a way as to supersede the need of care

and

and watchfulness on our part. In fact, it abounds with warnings and exhortations, to which we must take the utmost heed; and by attending to which we are to secure the blessings which it holds out to us. Nothing can be conceived more consolatory than all the foregoing declarations, that sufferings of whatever kind, and especially those inflicted on us for righteousness' sake, are permitted by our heavenly Father for our good, and shall be over-ruled by him for the advancement of our best interests. At the same time we are warned, that "without holiness, radical and universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord:" and we are cautioned to "look diligently," lest, by coming short of the requirements of the Gospel, we fail to attain a possession of its blessings.

The caution here given us is two-fold:

I. Not to come short of the Gospel in embracing it—

By "the grace of God" I understand "the Gospel of the grace of God," or that "grace of God which bringeth salvation." And by "failing of the grace of God," I understand, a falling short of it: the first part of our text being exactly parallel with that expression in the fourth chapter of this Epistle, "Let us fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to *come short* of it[a]." Now we may come short of the Gospel,

1. By not submitting to its humiliating doctrines—

[The Gospel views all men as in a lost and perishing condition. Its provisions are made for all mankind without exception. It knows nothing of persons so good as not to need salvation, or of persons so bad as to be beyond the reach of the salvation which it provides. It requires all to view themselves as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; and counsels them to come to the Lord Jesus Christ for eye-salve that they may see; for gold that they may be enriched; and for garments that they may be clothed[b]." It suffers none to bring any price in their hands, but requires them to receive every thing "without money and without price[c]." Nor does it merely require this of men at their first conversion: it prescribes the same humiliating system to the latest hour of our lives: Whatever our attainments be

[a] Heb. iv. 1. ὑστερηκέναι. [b] Rev. iii. 17, 18. [c] Isai. lv. 1.

be, we must renounce them all in point of dependence, and place our whole dependence on the Lord "Jesus Christ for wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." We must have no more in ourselves than the branch of a vine has; but must receive every thing from the stem into which we have been engrafted [d]. We must "receive every thing out of the fulness that is in Christ [e]," and must "live altogether by faith in the Son of God who has loved us, and given himself for us [f]."

But all this is very humiliating. Proud man does not like to be brought so low, as to depend wholly on another, and not at all on himself. We wish to have something of our own whereof we may boast. And to be reduced to a level with the vilest of the human race, so as to acknowledge ourselves as much indebted to Divine grace as they, is a humiliation to which we cannot endure to submit. Could we be saved in a way more congenial with our own feelings, we should be satisfied: but when it is said, "Wash and be clean," instead of accepting the tidings with gratitude, we spurn at them like Naaman, and go away in a rage [g].

To this however we must "*submit* [h]:" for there is no other way of salvation for any Child of man [i]: and, if we will not come to Christ upon his own terms, we must remain for ever destitute of the blessings he has purchased for us [k].]

2. By not obeying its self-denying doctrines—

[Though the Gospel gives salvation freely, it does not leave us at liberty to neglect good works; on the contrary, "it teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." Indeed, the sanctification it requires of us is as offensive to our carnal and worldly hearts, as the humiliation it imposes on us is to our pride. The object of the Gospel is, not merely to save men from death and hell, but to bring them back to a state of holy allegiance to their God, such as Adam experienced in Paradise. For this end it requires us to give up ourselves as living sacrifices unto God, and to be as *entirely* dedicated to his service as the burnt-offerings were, which were *wholly* consumed on the altar [l]. It enjoins us "neither to live unto ourselves, nor die unto ourselves;" but both in life and death to be together at the Lord's disposal, for the accomplishment of his will, and for the promotion of his glory [m].

Now to this measure of holiness we have by nature a deep and rooted aversion. We have many earthly and sensual appetites, which plead for indulgence: and when we are required to "cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye," and to "be holy as God himself is holy," we reply, "This is an hard saying; Who can

[d] John xv. 5. [e] John i. 16. [f] Gal. ii. 20.
[g] 2 Kin. v. 10—13. [h] Rom. x. 3. [i] Acts iv. 12 1 Cor. iii. 11.
[k] Rom. ix. 30—32. [l] Rom. xii. 1. [m] Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

can hear it?" To "mortify our members upon earth," and to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts," is a work, which, as the very terms in which it is expressed intimate, is painful to flesh and blood: and to be told that without this we never can be Christ's disciples, is most grating to our ears[n]. But nothing less than this will suffice for the approving of ourselves upright in the sight of God.

I beseech you then, Brethren, to "look diligently" to this matter, and not to come short of what the Gospel requires of you; for if you comply not both with its doctrines and its precepts, you can never partake of its privileges and its blessings.]

But respecting this Gospel, we are farther cautioned,

II. Not to dishonour it after we have embraced it—

We are in danger of dishonouring it,

1. By heretical opinions—

[It is to these chiefly, though not exclusively, that I suppose "the root of bitterness" to refer. The expression is adopted from the Old Testament, where Moses cautions the Israelites against any "root among them bearing gall and wormwood," and operating to the production of idolatry[o]. Such sprang up very early in the Christian Church; even as St. Paul forewarned the elders of Ephesus to expect: "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them[p]." Some there were who blended the Mosaic rites with the Gospel; others, who "denied the Resurrection, saying that it was past already;" others "denied the Lord who bought them:" and great was "the trouble," and extensive the defilement, which these heretics occasioned in the Church of Christ[q].

Such teachers there have been ever since in the Church, even to the present hour: and there is need of the utmost care that we be not drawn aside by any of them "from the simplicity that is in Christ[r]." Nothing can be more simple than the Gospel, when it is received in a humble child-like spirit. It requires nothing but a life of faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, and a life of love both towards God and man for his sake. The whole is comprehended in those words, "faith working by love." But men are fond of making the Gospel a theatre for disputation; and they care not how far they divert the minds of their followers from "the truth as it is in Jesus," if only they may but prevail upon them to receive their dogmas. This is the true root of all the heresies which have distracted and defiled the Church of God in all ages.

But be ye on your guard, Brethren, lest any such "root of bitterness"

[n] Gal. v. 24. [o] Deut. xxix. 19. [p] Acts xx. 29, 30.
[q] Gal. v. 7—10. 2 Tim. ii. 10—18. 2 Pet. ii. 1, 2.
[r] 2 Cor. xi. 3.

bitterness" spring up among you. It is well called "a root of bitterness," for nothing that ever yet divided the human race has caused more "bitterness" than that which calls itself religion, but which, in fact, is only some partial or erroneous view of religion, which conceit has propagated, and bigotry enforced.]

2. By ungodly practices—

[Grievous have been the falls of many who have professed religion; and shocking the scandals which have at times prevailed in the Christian Church. Evils, which obtained amongst the ignorant and licentious Gentiles, were indulged, and vindicated, by them after they had embraced the Gospel of Christ; and many, like profane Esau, bartered away the inheritance of heaven for some worthless perishable good.

Thus it is at this day. Many things are pleaded for, which are as opposite to the holy nature of the Gospel as "fornication" itself: and the vanities of time are yet daily exchanged for the glories of eternity. In vain are we reminded how bitterly Esau at last bewailed his error; or how fruitless were his efforts to remedy the evil he had committed. We see nothing in his example which speaks to us; nor have we any ears for the instruction it conveys to us. The influence of temptation is too strong for us: our earthly and sensual hearts will plead for gratifications which the Gospel of Christ does not allow: and thus multitudes relinquish all the blessings of eternity, through their undue attachment to the things of time and sense.

But let not such be found amongst you. It is melancholy to see that Demas, after being twice united with Luke in the salutations of St. Paul, should be found, "through love to this present world," "making shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience." But such instances occur in every age of the Church: and it requires continual watchfulness over our own hearts, and over each other too, to prevent the more frequent recurrence of similar apostacy. To all then I would recommend the example of St. Paul, who "kept his body under, and brought it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away[s]."]

The solemn hint with which our text concludes will furnish us with matter suited to ENFORCE the preceding subject—

1. Think what will ere long be your views of your present conduct, if you neglect the cautions which have been now suggested—

[Lightly as Esau once thought of his birthright, he saw at last that it was worthy to be "sought," yea, to be "sought carefully"

[s] 1 Cor. ix. 27.

fully" too, and *that* "with tears." And what will be your views of heaven when you are lying on a bed of sickness, or, at all events, the very instant that your soul enters upon the invisible world? Will an obedience to the Gospel then appear so hard a condition, that all the glory of heaven could not recompense you for complying with it; or the mortification of some forbidden lust so insupportable a task, that hell itself, with the indulgence of that lust, was a better portion than heaven with the mortification of it? No: the pangs of Esau will be your pangs, when you find how bitter are the consequences of your folly, and how irreversible the doom that has been pronounced.

Not that repentance, provided it had been genuine, would have been unavailing for Esau as far as related to his eternal state. Isaac had, though unwittingly, conferred the rights of primogeniture on Jacob; and he would not reverse his word, notwithstanding all the bitter cries with which Esau importuned him to do so. And this is what is meant, when it is said, that Esau "found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." Had he repented before God, he might have obtained pardon with God: as we also may do, through our Lord Jesus Christ. But, if we do not turn to God through Christ with our whole hearts, we shall find ere long the door of mercy shut against us, and in vain implore admission to that bliss which now we have despised [t].]

2. Yield to the Gospel, without delay, the obedience which it requires—

[Infinite are the blessings which it offers to us. And what are the sacrifices which we are called to make? ——— Be they ever so difficult or self-denying, they are not worth a thought in comparison of "the *grace* that shall be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ." The wise merchantman parted with *all* for the pearl of great price. Do ye the same: and determine through grace, that, whatever it may cost, you will not come short of it by refusing to make the sacrifices, or suffer either men or devils to rob you of it.]

[t] Luke xiii. 24—27.

MCXXIX.

THE TRANSCENDENT EXCELLENCY OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

Heb. xii. 18—25. *Ye are not come unto the Mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words;*

words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (for they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) but ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for, if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.

IN explaining the holy Scriptures, it is often requisite that we carefully bear in mind, not only the immediate context, but the whole scope of the book in which any particular passage occurs. This is of the first importance in considering several expressions in the epistle of St. James, and it is not unimportant in the passage before us.

The general scope of the epistle to the Hebrews is, to encourage the Jewish Christians to hold fast their profession in the midst of all the persecutions they endured: And the principal argument used for their encouragement is, the great superiority of the Christian religion above that which they had renounced. In the foregoing part of the epistle, this subject is treated at large: and, in the words which we have read, there is a kind of re-capitulation of it, purposely introduced, in order to confirm the Hebrews in a steady adherence to the faith which they had embraced, and to shew them the dreadful danger of departing from it.

Hence, in elucidating this passage, we shall have occasion to shew,

I. The transcendent excellence of the Christian dispensation—

The circumstances which took place at the giving of the law, are all particularly and distinctly referred to:

to[a]: and they exhibit in very striking characters the nature of the law itself. The law was never given in order that the people might rest in it, or expect life from it; but that they might be made to know and feel their need of that better covenant which God would make with them under the Gospel dispensation. Instead of bringing men to God, it kept them at the greatest distance from him, not a soul being suffered to touch the Mount on which he revealed himself, nor so much as a beast touching it without having instant death inflicted on him. Instead of producing any thing like filial love and confidence, it inspired only fear and terror, and, as the Apostle says, "gendered to bondage[b]." Even Moses himself said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." Instead of offering life to any one, it was altogether "a ministration of condemnation and death[c]."

Now, says the Apostle, ye who have received the Gospel are not come to such a dispensation as that; "ye have not received the spirit of bondage *again* to fear[d]:" but ye are come,

1. To a better place—

[Mount Sinai differed not from any other mount: it might be seen and touched like any other place. But not so the Mount to which those who believe in Christ are come: "they are come to Mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," a place not visible to mortal eyes, nor like to any place which mortal hands have formed: it is a place formed by Almighty God for his own immediate residence, and for the fullest manifestations of his glory.]

2. To a nobler society—

[Angels indeed were present at the giving of the law: but the Jews had no communion with them: they were only God's agents for augmenting the terror of the scene[e]. Their whole tribes too were there convened: but it was only that they might all be filled with the same dread of God's wrath, and be made to unite in that urgent request, that God would speak to them no more by an audible voice, but only through Moses as a Mediator[f]. But those who believe in Christ are come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born,

[a] Compare ver. 18—21, with Exod. xix. 14—25.
[b] Gal. iv. 24. [c] 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9. [d] Rom. viii. 15.
[e] Acts. vii. 53. with Ps. lxviii. 17. [f] Deut. v. 22—28.

born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New covenant." Yes, the glorified saints and angels all belong to the same blessed assembly to which Believers are now called: and "God, even as a Judge," is no longer to them an object of dread, because they know that he at the same time is their Father: and they have "Jesus as their Mediator" with him; and "the New covenant" as the rule according to which they shall be dealt with by him. Here all is no longer fear and terror, but peace and joy.]

3. To far more exalted privileges—

[Moses, the morning after the giving of the law, offered burnt-offerings; with the blood of which he sprinkled both the book of the covenant which had been made with the people, and the people themselves, saying, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord had made with you concerning all these words[g]." But what did this covenant avail them? The very blood with which it was ratified served only to testify against them as violating their own engagements, and making void every promise contained in it. But the blood of sprinkling to which the Christian is come, effectually removes from him all his sin, and prevails for his perfect reconciliation with God. The blood which Abel offered in sacrifice, received a visible and most honourable token of God's acceptance of it[h]: but, however blessed that *external* testimony was, it was not worthy to be compared with that *internal* "witness of the Spirit," with which Believers in Christ are sealed; which assures them of their adoption into God's family, and their everlasting fruition of his glory: it seals them, not for a time only, but unto the day of redemption; and is to them, not a seal only, but a pledge and earnest and foretaste of heaven itself[i]. The very same eternal love which "elects them to obedience," elects them also to this "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ[k]."]

The Apostle, however, not content with exhibiting thus the transcendent excellence of Christianity, proceeds to point out,

II. The indispensable necessity of paying to it the attention it requires—

The warning which he gives to the Hebrews is most solemn; "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh:" and the argument with which he enforces it is most awful; "for, if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall

[g] Exod. xxiv. 4—8. [h] Heb. xi. 4. [i] Eph. i. 13, 14. [k] 1 Pet. i. 2.

shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven."

Hear then the warning—

[Look into the history of the Hebrews: see what became of those who refused obedience to the Sinai covenant: they perished; even that whole nation perished, (of those at least who had attained the age of full maturity,) with the exception of two. For one single transgression of it was Moses himself excluded from the earthly Canaan[l]. The extreme severity of the law against any wilful and presumptuous violation of its commands, is again and again held forth as a warning[m] to us under the Gospel dispensation, and particularly in the epistle before us: "If the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation[m]?" So again; "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace[n]?" Well may such warnings as these sink down into our ears, and make us tremble at the thought of disobedience to the Gospel covenant!]

Acknowledge also the justice of it—

[Think how the Christian covenant has been delivered: not by a terrific voice, uttered from a cloud by a Being that was invisible, but by the Lord Jesus Christ himself descending from the highest heavens to make it known to us in the mild accents of love and mercy. Think too of its contents. To what does it call us, but to a conformity with the holy angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect? It brings us into favour with God, precisely as they are. It invites us to begin their employments now, and even on earth to participate their bliss. It makes every provision for the end: it offers pardon, and peace, and righteousness, and glory to all who by faith will lay hold upon it. Say then, What do not they deserve who refuse to listen to invitations like these? Verily, we cannot but acknowledge, that, if the judgments denounced against the disobedient Israelites were just, much more must the heaviest judgments that can ever be inflicted upon us be just, if we refuse to listen to him who speaks to us with such astonishing condescension and grace.]

We must not omit to notice, that the Apostle here takes for granted, respecting every true Christian, that he is thus come to Mount Sion.

Permit

[l] Deut. xxxii. 50, 51. [m] Ch. ii. 2, 3. [n] Ch. x. 28, 29.

Permit me then, in CONCLUSION,

1. To make this a matter of inquiry—

[Have you indeed come thus to Mount Sion? Have you turned your backs on Mount Sinaï, from a deep conviction that you are condemned by the law, and have no hope at all but from the gracious provisions of the Gospel? Have you obtained an insight into the nature of true religion, as consisting in a communion with God and with the heavenly hosts, and an actual participation of the mind, the spirit, the blessedness of heaven? Ah! how rarely is Christianity viewed in this light! It is regarded rather as a mere system of restraints enforced with terror, than as an earnest and antepast of the heavenly bliss! I pray you, not to imagine that you have ever yet set out aright, if you have not thus passed from Mount Sinaï unto Sion, and from Moses unto Christ.]

2. To address you under the supposition which is here made—

[I will suppose, that "you are come unto Mount Sion." Yet much would I guard you, as the Apostle did the Hebrews, against yielding to any species of temptation that may deprive you of the blessings to which, according to your Christian profession, you are entitled. It is no uncommon thing for persons to make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, even after they have for some time maintained, in appearance at least, an upright walk and conversation. But beware lest ye be in any wise hindered in running the race that is set before you: difficulties ye must meet with both within and without: and it is well that you do meet with them; for how else shall your fidelity to God be tried? But ask yourselves, What any of the holy angels would do if they were in your place? or what any of the spirits of the just that are now made perfect would reply to those who should either by menaces or allurements attempt to turn them from God? You cannot doubt. Be ye then like them, to whose society you are brought, and with whom you are to dwell through everlasting ages: and as ye are already come to the very gate of heaven, see that "an entrance into it be ministered unto you abundantly through Jesus Christ our Lord."]

MCXXX.

GOD TO BE SERVED WITH REVERENTIAL FEAR.

Heb. xii. 28, 29. *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably*

acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire.

THE Christian world are little aware how much we are indebted to the holy Apostles, or rather to God, by whose inspiration they wrote, for the light which they have thrown upon the prophecies of the Old Testament. To this hour should we have been almost as much in the dark respecting the import of them as the Ethiopian Eunuch was, if God had not sent us persons authorized and empowered to unfold their true meaning. The passage which that Gentile Proselyte was reading when Philip joined himself to his chariot, was as clear as any part of Isaiah's prophecies: yet, when asked by Philip, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" he replied, "How can I, except some man should guide me[a]?" So we should have still been at a loss to know of whom the prophets spake in numberless passages[b], if God had not raised up holy men to give us the desired information. Let us take for instance, the prophecy which is cited by the Apostle in the verses before our text. It is taken from the prophet Haggai, and is adduced by St. Paul in order to confirm his preceding declarations respecting the superiority of the Christian dispensation above that of the Jews. And we may well suppose that an uninspired Jew, if conversant with the Scriptures, would have understood the passage as referring to the Messiah[c]. The construction which he would have put upon it would probably have been to this effect: 'God shook the earth when he established the Mosaic dispensation: but, when he shall introduce the Messiah himself, he will do it with far greater convulsions of universal nature.' But let us see the explanation of it which the Apostle has given us: He first somewhat alters the words, in order to make them express more fully the mind of God in them; and then he gives us this interpretation of them: "This word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be

[a] Acts viii. 28—31. [b] ib. ver. 34. [c] Hag. ii. 6, 7.

be shaken may remain." Thus he shews us that not any convulsion of nature was intended, like that which took place at Mount Sanai; but the total removal of the whole civil and ecclesiastical polity of the Jews was predicted, in order to make way for the immoveable and everlasting kingdom of the Messiah. Then, on the passage thus explained, he founds this exhortation: "Wherefore we receiving *a kingdom which cannot be moved*, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire."

The points to be especially noticed in this passage are,

I. The privilege which all true Christians have received—

"They have received a kingdom which cannot be moved:" they have received it,

1. As that to which they are to submit—

[The Lord Jesus Christ is he of whom Jehovah has said, "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion[d]." And "his kingdom admits of no change." The dispensation which had been introduced by Moses, "waxed old, and vanished away;" but that which Christ has established is ever "new[e]." "His dominion," says the prophet, "is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed[f]." Men and devils will no doubt combine for its destruction: but "the gates of hell shall never prevail against it[g]." — — —

To this kingdom all true Believers belong. They once were vassals of the God of this world: but they have been "translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son." Their language now is, "Other lords besides thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name[h]." Into the name of Christ they have been baptized; and to his service have they willingly devoted themselves; engaging to fulfil his will, and even to lay down their lives, if need be, for his sake.]

2. As that which they are to inherit—

[All the blessings of it are theirs: and it is administered altogether for their good. The King himself has their interest in

[d] Ps. ii. 6. [e] Heb. viii. 13. [f] Dan. vii. 14.
[g] Matt. xvi. 18. [h] Isai. xxvi. 13.

in view, as much as if he had not another subject in his realm to occupy his attention. Their enemies are all restrained, and shall all, not excepting Satan himself, ere long be bruised under their feet. All the protection which they can need, and all the provision which their souls can desire, are secured to them: "they dwell on high; their place of defence is the munition of rocks: their bread is daily given them, and their water is sure[i]." Nor can these be moved, any more than the kingdom itself can. Neither time nor chance can impair the blessings themselves, or rob them of the enjoyment of them. The pardon, the peace, the holiness, the glory, are theirs, not for time only, but for eternity———And this is the portion, not of some few favoured individuals only, as Prophets and Apostles, but of every Believer, however poor, however unworthy. To the whole body of Believers, without exception, it is said, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give *you* the kingdom[k]." Hear this, ye who are poor in this world, and survey the riches to which God has chosen you[l]: in respect of your earthly state, ye may be said to be "upon a dunghill: but God has taken you thence, to set you among the princes[m]." "*Ye have received a kingdom*:" "Christ has appointed to you a kingdom, even as his Father has appointed unto him a kingdom[n];" and has ordained that "you shall sit with him upon his throne, as he sitteth on his Father's throne[o]:" Ye may be "beggars," as it respects temporal possessions; but ye are "kings[p]:" and respecting all of you, Jehovah himself says, "I know your poverty; but ye are rich[q]."]

Let not any, however, be so elated with their privilege as to overlook,

II. Their duty as connected with it—

"We must serve God with reverence and godly fear"—

[Privilege and duty are so connected, that they can never under any circumstances be separated from each other; and any attempt to separate them will infallibly issue in our ruin. A kingdom has been given us, it is true: and "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." But ye must "serve God," and serve him too "with reverence and godly fear." We must not presume upon his mercy, or take occasion from it to indulge in carelessness and supineness. We must never forget with what a God we have to do. "He is a great God, and greatly to be feared." Though his dispensations are altered, he himself is not altered: "He is a consuming fire" now, as much as

[i] Isai. xxxiii. 16. [k] Luke xii. 32. [l] Jam. ii. 5.
[m] 1 Sam. ii. 8. [n] Luke xxii. 29. [o] Rev. iii. 21.
[p] Rev. i. 6. [q] Rev. ii. 9.

as he was in the day that he proclaimed his law from Mount Sinai: and he must still "be had in reverence of all them that are round about him[r]." True indeed, we are not now to "fear and quake before him," as the Israelites, and Moses himself, then did: for "he has not given us the Spirit of bondage *again* to fear, but a Spirit of adoption, whereby we may cry, Abba, Father[s]:" but still we must "stand in awe of him[t]," and fear to offend him, knowing that "he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity without the utmost abhorrence of it[u]." In whomsoever wilful sin is found, he will visit it with fiery indignation; and most of all in those who profess themselves his servants[x]. "If we regard iniquity in our hearts, he will not hear us," or acknowledge us. We must seek to "be holy, as he is holy;" and "perfect, as he is perfect:" and the circumstance of our having been "sealed by him unto the day of redemption," is a reason why we should be more than ever careful, not either by word or deed, and, if possible, not even by a thought, to "grieve his holy Spirit." Our labour should be to have "our every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ[z]." It is in this way alone that we can serve God "acceptably:" and in this way alone can we prove our title to the kingdom which we profess to have received.]

For strength to do this, we must seek his grace from day to day—

[We have no strength in ourselves even for a good thought[a]: "Without Christ we can do nothing[b]." But there is a fulness of grace treasured up in him; and out of his fulness must we continually receive those supplies of grace which we stand in need of[c]. We must not be satisfied with such a measure of grace as may suffice to bring us to God; but must labour for such a measure as may enable us to serve him, and to "serve him acceptably" to the latest hour of our lives. Especially must we seek a meekness of spirit, an humility of mind, a tenderness of conscience, a purity of heart, an hatred of sin, an abhorrence of ourselves on account of sin, a holy desire to please God, a love to his will, a delight in his service, and an utter contempt even of life itself in comparison of his honour and glory. But these are attainments which he alone can give: therefore we must cry day and night unto him for more and more grace, and must labour for them only in a dependence on his good Spirit.

To this state of mind we must be brought by the consideration of the unbounded mercies bestowed upon us: "*Having received a kingdom*," we must thus seek his grace, and thus labour joyfully

[r] Ps. lxxxix. 7. [s] Rom. viii. 15. [t] Ps. ii. 11. & iv. 4.
[u] Hab. i. 13. [x] Am. iii. 2. [y] Eph. iv. 30.
[z] 2 Cor. x. 5. [a] 2 Cor. iii. 5. [b] John xlv. 5.
[c] Col. i. 19. with John i. 16.

fully to fulfil his will: for so the Apostle elsewhere teaches us: "I beseech you by the mercies of God that ye present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God, as your reasonable service[d]."]

The CONCLUDING DECLARATION in our text deserving more especial notice, I will draw your attention to it,

1. To augment your thankfulness for the Gospel of Christ—

[We see how terrible the presence of God was when he appeared as a consuming fire upon Mount Sinai. But, how much more terrible is it in that world where he is inflicting vengeance both on men and devils as the monuments of his wrath! Yet that is the view of him which we should have had to all eternity, if the Lord Jesus Christ had not interposed to effect our reconciliation with him, and to restore us to his favour — — — Can we reflect on this, and not adore that blessed Saviour, who "bore our sins in his own body on the tree," and "died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God?" Think for a moment of that place which he has "ordained of old, the pile whereof is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it[e]." Think of the state of the souls which are confined there, all of them drinking "of the wine of God's wrath, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and tormented with fire and brimstone, having no rest, and the smoke of their torment ascending up for ever and ever[f]:" and then let us ask ourselves, "Who amongst us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who amongst us can dwell with everlasting burnings[g]?" Verily, if we would more habituate ourselves to consider the justice, and holiness, and majesty of our God, we should know no bounds to our gratitude for the work of redemption: our every thought would be thankfulness; and our every word be praise — — —]

2. To preserve upon your minds a holy dread of sin—

[Still must it be said, as in the days of old, "The Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God[h]:" And we should never for a moment lose sight of him under that character. It is fit that he should be jealous, and suffer no rival in our hearts. In harbouring any unhallowed lust, we are as great enemies to our own happiness as we are to his glory: and he would have loved us less, if he had given us any reason to hope for impunity in the ways of sin. Be ye then jealous over yourselves

[d] Rom. xii. 1. [e] Isai. xxx. 33. [f] Rev. xiv. 10, 11.
[g] Isai. xxxiii. 14. [h] Deut. iv. 24.

selves with a godly jealousy, lest there be found in you any thing which is displeasing in his sight. Let your conscience be tender even as the apple of your eye; and if but a mote come upon it, let it not abide there for a moment; but weep it away with tears of penitential sorrow, and wash it away with the blood of Christ, which alone can cleanse you even from the smallest sin. Bear in mind, that what ye are in respect of holiness, that ye are in the sight of God: and recollecting, that "his eyes are as a flame of fire," and that "he weighs, not your actions" only, but "even your spirits" also, "be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless[i]."]

[i] 2 Pet. iii. 14.

MCXXXI.

COMPASSION TO THE DISTRESSED INCULCATED.

Heb. xiii. 3. *Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.*

IN the first ages of Christianity persecution raged to a degree that we at this time have little conception of: bonds and imprisonment were no uncommon lot, especially amongst those who were active in the service of their Lord. The loss of all things was also not unfrequently added to the other trials of the saints; so that their afflictions were greatly multiplied and exceeding heavy. At such a season, it was incumbent on every Member of the Church to compassionate the distresses of his afflicted Brethren, and by a participation of their burthens to lighten their pressure, and to alleviate the sorrows occasioned by them. To this they might well be stimulated by the consideration that they themselves were constantly exposed to the same trials, and might soon need the same relief, which they were administering to others. Through the goodness of God *we* know but little of these trials. The persecutions of the present day amount to little more than contempt and hatred, and in some few instances a little outward opposition to our worldly interests. Still however there are afflictions of other kinds in abundance to which we all are

are subject; and under which it becomes us all to manifest the tenderest compassion towards each other, not knowing how soon it may become our own lot to need the sympathy which we ourselves have exercised. In this view, the exhortation in our text deserves the attention of every Child of man. Let us notice in it,

I. The duty inculcated—

Compassion towards our suffering fellow-creatures is a duty universally acknowledged. If the household of faith are entitled to a preference in our regards, as certainly they are[a], our benevolence is not to be restricted to them: it is to be exercised generally towards all the sons and daughters of affliction; and *that* too in a way of,

1. Tender sympathy—

[We should "remember them that are in bonds" or afflictions of any kind, not with a transient sigh, or a few customary expressions of condolence, but "as actually bound with them," and as being ourselves partakers of their sorrows. We can read of the desolations and ravages of war, or of the miseries occasioned by storms and tempests, and pass them over almost without any emotion, and in a few minutes utterly forget them. But, if we felt aright, we should enter into all the troubles of the sufferers, just as if we ourselves were in their very state and condition. Paint to yourselves the anguish of shipwrecked mariners, expecting every moment to be their last: or, if their feelings may be supposed to be so acute as not to be capable of being transfused into the bosom of one who is not exposed to such perils, conceive of persons immured in dungeons, or racked with pains and destitute of all needful succour; or contemplate the widow bereaved of all that she held dear in this world, and of all that she relied on for the support of herself and her helpless offspring; I say, conceive of sorrows as brought home to your own bosom, and as experienced in your own soul; and then you will see how you ought to realize in your minds the miseries of others, and to pant for an opportunity to relieve them.]

2. Fervent prayer—

[" Intercession," we are told, "should be made for all men;" but more especially should it be so in behalf of those, whose troubles render them objects of more than ordinary compassion. St. James says, "Is any sick among you, let him call for the Elders

[a] Gal. vi. 10.

Elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick: and, if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him[b]." You well know how a man will plead with God for the wife of his bosom, or for his beloved child, whose dissolution he apprehends to be fast approaching. Thus should we enter into the distresses of others also, and should plead with God in their behalf. David did thus even in behalf of his very enemies: "When they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth, and I humbled my soul with fasting[c]:" and in this way should we also make our prayer unto God, in the hope that he will interpose effectually in their behalf, and bestow on them the blessings, which it is not within the power of any finite creature to impart.]

3. Active services—

[We are not to say "Be ye warmed, and be ye filled, and at the same time withhold" from our Brethren the aid which we are able to bestow[d]: such compassion as that is mere hypocrisy. Our Lord tells us in what way our sympathy should display itself; "I was an-hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me[e]." All indeed have it not in their power to exert themselves to the same extent: some have more leisure, and more ability, than others: but all can do something for their poor neighbours: some friendly service they can render; some word of comfort they can speak: and what they cannot administer in their own persons, they may procure through the instrumentality of others[f] — — — At all events, if it be only a cup of cold water that we can bestow, it should be given with a zeal and tenderness that shall evince the strength of an internal principle, and the wish that our means were more adequate to the occasion.

The proper example for us to follow, is that of the Macedonians, of whom the Apostle testifies, that, notwithstanding they were themselves "in a great trial of affliction, and in deep poverty, yet abounded unto the riches of liberality: and that to their power, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves; and prayed the Apostle with much intreaty to take upon himself the ministration of their bounty to the saints[g]." This is the point to be aimed at: there must first be a willing mind: and, where that is, God will accept the offering however small[h].]

Such

[b] Jam. v. 14, 15. [c] Ps. xxxv. 13.
[d] Jam. ii. 15, 16. [e] Matt. xxv. 35, 36.
[f] If this were in aid of *a Benevolent Society*, or any other Charity, the particular benefits of the Institution, as imparting what no mere individual could impart, may be stated here.
[g] 2 Cor. viii. 1—4. [h] ib. ver. 12.

Such is the duty here inculcated. Let us now attend to,

II. The consideration with which it is enforced—

When the Apostle says, "Do this," as being yourselves also in the body, he must be understood as intimating,

1. That we ourselves are exposed to the same afflictions as others—

[And this is true respecting every living man. No one is exempt from trouble. If any man was ever justified in saying, "I shall die in my nest," it was Job: yet behold he, with all his wealth and power, was in a few days reduced to the most abject state that can be imagined. There are ten thousand sources of affliction which God may open, and cause our souls to be deluged with it in an instant. Our bodies may be racked with disease, or our spirits be overwhelmed with domestic troubles: or, whilst all external things are prospering, our souls may be so bowed down with a sense of sin, and so agitated with a dread of God's judgments, that we may hate our very existence, and "choose strangling rather than life." Indeed whoever he be that thinks with David, "My mountain stands strong; I shall not be moved," he may expect that God will speedily "hide his face from him; and that trouble shall ere long come upon him," as the punishment of his iniquity.]

2. That what measure we mete to others, we may expect to have meted to ourselves—

[Mankind at large feel a far greater disposition to exert themselves in behalf of a man of active benevolence, than they do for one whose regards have terminated on himself alone. But it is not on the good dispositions of men that we are called to rely. God himself has engaged, that what we do for others, he will accept as done to himself; and "that what we lend to him, he will repay us again." Very remarkable are his promises to this effect: "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive: and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. *The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing; and make all his bed in his sickness*[1]." The language of the prophet Isaiah is yet stronger still: "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, (Observe, it is not our *money* only, but our *soul*, with all its tenderest emotions, that is to be drawn forth,) and if thou satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day: and the Lord shall guide thee continually,

[1] Ps xli. 1—3.

tinually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not[k]." Here Almighty God himself is pledged to recompense into our bosom the kindness which we shew to others: and "he will recompence it in full measure, pressed down, and running over." If then we would have consolations ministered to us in our troubles, let us labour to impart them to our afflicted brethren: for "what we sow, we shall reap;" if we supply the wants of others, God will supply ours[kk]; and if "we cast our bread upon the waters, we shall be sure to find it after many days."]

For your direction in reference to this duty, we beg leave to offer the following HINTS:

1. Do not undervalue the grace of charity—

[It is too often overlooked, not only by the world at large, but also by many who profess godliness; who imagine, that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is all that is needful for their best interests. But let me say, that, whatever faith a man may have, "if he have not love also, real, active, self-denying love, he is no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." Only recollect how great a stress St. James lays on "visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction," when he declares, that "pure and undefiled religion" mainly consists in such offices; and you will never be satisfied till you attain this heavenly disposition, nor ever think that you can exercise it too much.]

2. Do not overvalue it—

[If you put your own benevolence in the place of Christ, and rely on that to purchase the remission of your sins, you will then indeed build on a foundation of sand. Know, that however much you may abound in acts of benevolence, "you are still unprofitable servants, who have done only what it was your duty to do." If you really seek the glory of God in what you do, your services will come up with acceptance before him, and they will be to him as an odour of a sweet smell. But you must never forget that your goodness extendeth not to God, nor can confer any obligation upon him. On the contrary, the more you do for him, the more you are indebted to him; because "all your power either to will or do what is good, is from him alone." "It is not you that do it, but the grace of God that is with you."]

3. Endeavour to abound in it more and more.

[See the character of holy Job: "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him: the blessing of him that was

[k] Isai. lviii. 10, 11. [kk] Phil. iv. 14, 19.

was ready to perish came upon me; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy[l]." Oh! what a lovely character was that! What a bright resemblance of the Saviour, "who went about doing good!" Dear Brethren, set this example before you, and strive to imitate it to the utmost of your power. Thus will you shine as lights in the world; and thus "fulfilling the law of Christ[m]," you will insure his approbation in the day of judgment[n].]

[l] Job xxix. 11—13. [m] Gal. vi. 3. [n] Heb. vi. 10. 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

MCXXXII.

GOD'S PROMISED PRESENCE AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO DUTY.

Heb. xiii. 5, 6. *Let your conversation be without covetousness: and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee: so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

THE end of knowledge is practice: and hence the Apostle closes all his epistles with practical exhortations. The argumentative part of this epistle terminated at the close of the preceding chapter. This chapter begins with some particular exhortations suited to the Hebrews at that time. The advice contained in our text is suited to the Church in every state and every age: and the encouragement with which it is enforced, gives it a more than common interest. In truth, it is the promised presence and assistance of God, which is our great incentive to every duty; since without his aid we can do nothing, but with it can effect whatsoever God himself requires of us.

Let us consider,

I. The promise here recorded—

The promise was originally given to Joshua: but in our text it is represented as spoken to each of us. And in this light it ought to be viewed: for it was not given to Joshua as a mere insulated individual, but as the head of God's people, whom he was conducting

ducting into Canaan: and between them and us there is a close resemblance: they were about to conflict with many enemies, whom they must destroy, before they could possess the Promised Land: and we also must sustain many conflicts before we can attain the full enjoyment of the heavenly Canaan. To us therefore there is the same need of the promise, as to him; and to us also is there the same right and title; seeing that it was spoken for the encouragement of all God's Israel to the end of time.

The promise that God "will not leave us nor forsake us," imports that he will be ever with us,

1. By the operations of his providence—

[There is not any thing in the whole universe which is not under his controul. "Not even a sparrow falls to the ground" without his special appointment: and "the very hairs of our head are all numbered." Circumstances indeed may occur which may cause us to tremble for the issue of them: but he will so overrule them all, as to "make them eventually work together for our good[a]." We may be reduced almost to despair; and may be ready to say with the Church of old, "The Lord hath forsaken and forgotten us[b]:" but he will ere long force us to acknowledge that such fears were the fruit only of "our own infirmity[c];" and that the very things which we complained of as "against us," were no other than his appointed means for accomplishing all his gracious designs towards us[d]. Our dangers may be as imminent as those of Israel at the Red Sea; but that shall be the time for him to open for us a way to escape from them. Our wants may be as urgent as those of Israel afterwards in the Wilderness; but that shall be the time for giving us manna from heaven, and water from the rock. The time for any interposition may seem to have actually elapsed; but still "in the Mount the Lord shall be seen," precisely as he was when he arrested the uplifted arm of Abraham, and restored his Isaac to his embrace. "The vision may tarry; but never beyond the appointed and the fittest time[e]."]

2. By the communications of his grace—

[These are necessary for us, and must be renewed to us day by day: and if for one moment they be suspended, we must inevitably fall. But God will not withdraw from his waiting and praying people. He may indeed suffer temptations to arise, such as shall threaten to plunge us into irremediable ruin; and he may even

[a] Rom. viii. 28. [b] Isai. xlix. 14. [c] Ps. lxxvii. 7—10.
[d] Gen. xlii. 36. [e] Hab. ii. 3.

even permit Satan for a time to prevail against us; but still he will not utterly forsake us; but will restore our souls, and make our very falls subservient to the augmenting of our humility and watchfulness throughout the remainder of our lives, and to the qualifying of us for warning, and exhorting, and comforting others with increased effect[f]. So also he may permit our trials to abide; and, though intreated by us ever so much, may not see fit to remove them. But "his grace shall be sufficient for us," and shall be the more magnified in us, in proportion as our conflicts are severe, and our victories conspicuous[g]. He may, for wise and gracious purposes, hide his face from us; but it shall be only for a little moment, that the riches of his grace may be the more abundantly displayed in the subsequent manifestations of his love and favour[h]. If it be asked, Why he will thus continue his loving-kindness to them? We answer, "For his own sake," and because "he changeth not[i];" as it is said, "He will not forsake his people; because it hath pleased him to make you his people[k]."]

That this promise may produce its due effects, let us consider,

II. The use we should make of it—

Innumerable are the benefits to be derived from it: but we shall specify only two: it should encourage us to discard, as unworthy of us,

1. All inordinate desires—

["Our whole conversation should be without covetousness or discontent." We should desire nothing which God has not seen fit to give us, nor murmur at any thing which he has ordained for us. For, what can we want, or what can we have to complain of, whilst he is with us? Could any worldly good add to our happiness, or give any security to us for its continuance? Would treasures, however great, be a richer portion than he? or would the loss of them be felt, if it led us to seek more entirely our happiness in him? "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble[l]?" If we have but the light of his countenance lifted up upon us, nothing can augment, nor can any thing diminish, our bliss. Many of these Hebrews had "taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods:" and thousands in every age have been able to testify from their own blessed experience, that "as their afflictions have abounded, so also have their consolations abounded by Christ[m]." Let us only possess "the Lord for the portion of our inheritance and of our cup; and have that lot maintained

[f] Luke xxii. 31, 32. [g] 2 Cor. xii. 7—9. [h] Isai. liv. 7—10.
[i] Mal. iii. 6. Jam. i. 17. Rom. xi. 29. [k] 1 Sam. xii. 22.
[l] Job xxxiv. 29. [m] 2 Cor. i. 5.

maintained to us;" and however small our portion be as it respects this world, we shall have reason to say, "The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage[n]."]

2. All anxious fears—

[The ungodly imagine that they can prevail against the Lord's people: but they are no more than an axe or saw in the hands of him that useth it: they can do no more than our God and Father is pleased to do by them[o]. Now who will tremble at a sword that is in his father's hands? If indeed our God were ever weary, or absent, or disinclined to interpose for us, or if the creature could effect any thing without his special permission, there were some reason for fear: but when he is as "our shade upon our right hand;" when he is as "a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in the midst of us[p];" whom shall we fear? "Who can have access, to harm us[p]," if we be hid under the shadow of His wings? "If He be for us, who can be against us[r]?" Whatever confederacies then may be against us, whether of men or devils, we need not fear: in Him, as our sanctuary, we may deride their efforts, and defy their malice[s]. What should be the state of our minds, the holy Psalmist has shewn us; "Be merciful unto me, O God; for man would *swallow me up:* he fighting daily, oppresseth me. Mine enemies would *daily* swallow me up: for they be *many* that fight against me, O thou Most High. But, what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God will I praise his word: in God I have put my trust: I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: *this I know*; for God is for me. In God will I praise his word; in the Lord will I praise his word. In God have I put my trust; I will not be afraid what man can do unto me[t]."]

SEE then from hence,

1. Of what importance it is to treasure up the promises in our minds—

[The promises of God are our great support under trials, and at the same time our great encouragements to fulfil our duty; since they assure us of all needful aid, both for the sustaining of the one, and the performance of the other. It is by them that we are enabled to cleanse ourselves from sin[u]; and by them to attain the image of God upon our souls[x]. Let us then lay hold of them; and, to whomsoever they may have been spoken in the first instance, appropriate them to ourselves. Let us rest upon them, and plead them before God, as Jacob did[y]: and know that "in Christ they are all yea, and amen[z]," as unchangeable as God

[n] Ps. xvi. 5, 6. [o] Isai. x. 15. [p] Zech. ii. 5.
[q] 1 Pet. iii. 13—15. [r] Rom. viii. 31. [s] Isai. viii. 12—14.
[t] Ps. lvi. 1—4, 9—11. [u] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [x] 2 Pet. i. 4.
[y] Gen. xxviii. 15. with xxxii. 12. [z] 2 Cor. i. 20.

God himself. O what a treasure does that man possess who has laid up in his mind the most comprehensive promises of his God! He can be in no trouble, wherein he has not abundant consolation; and in no want, wherein he has not an adequate supply. O Beloved, let the word of Christ, and the promises of your God, "dwell in you richly in all wisdom." Mark the emphatic manner in which they are pronounced. Look at that before us, in particular: as recorded in our Translation, it is strong; but as it is in the Original, its force exceeds the powers of our language to express: there are no less than five negatives to confirm the negation[a]. When will God violate *that* promise—"Heaven and earth shall pass away; but not one jot or tittle of that promise shall ever fail[b]?"]

2. How truly blessed is a life of faith—

[What a source of misery to mankind is a covetous and discontented spirit! and what a prey are they to trouble, who have no refuge from the cares and fears which agitate the ungodly world! But faith in God is a perfect antidote to them all. It assures us of a God ever nigh at hand to help and succour his believing people. See how the promise in our text is introduced: it is there suggested as sufficient to counterbalance the loss of every thing however desirable, or the apprehension of every thing however formidable. It is suggested, in order to inspire us with a confidence which nothing can intimidate: "*We may boldly say*, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me." Think of an angel sent down to sojourn here: What would either the acquisition or loss of riches affect him? or what would any confederacies either of men or devils concern him? He would feel as satisfied and as secure as if he were in heaven itself. This then is the tranquillity which we also, according to the measure of our faith, are privileged to enjoy. Let us then "know in whom we have believed." Let us "cast all our care on him who careth for us[c]." And let us so realize the promises of our God, as to know that nothing ever shall, or ever can, separate us from his love[d].]

[a] See the Greek. [b] Matt. xxiv. 35.
[c] 1 Pet. v. 7. [d] Ps. xlvi. 1—3. Rom. viii. 38, 39.

MCXXXIII.

CAUTION AGAINST FALSE DOCTRINES.

Heb. xiii. 9. *Be not carried away with divers and strange doctrines: for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.*

TRUTH lies not on the surface, but must be sought after with diligence. This is true in every science;

science; but most of all, true in religion. In all other sciences, intellectual powers only are required: in religion, there must be integrity of heart, and a sincere desire to do, as well as to know, the will of God. To other knowledge there is no obstruction from within: if only there be a sufficiency of information and of capacity to comprehend it, truth will make its way into the mind of those who seek it. But to the progress of religious truth there are many obstacles in the heart of man; many prejudices, many passions, many interests present a barrier to obstruct its entrance into the soul; and these must be in a great measure removed, before the light of truth can break through the clouds which intercept its rays. Yet in one respect is religious truth of easier attainment than any other: for to the acquisition of it great intellectual powers are not necessary: nor is general erudition necessary. All that is wanting is, a humble, teachable spirit, that will seek instruction from God, and receive with child-like simplicity all that God has spoken in his word. Such an one, provided he seek with diligence, and with a determination of heart to fulfil the will of God as far as he can learn it, will assuredly be guided into all truth. But that very simplicity of mind which is necessary to the attainment of truth, subjects a person, if he be not much upon his guard, to be imposed upon by those, who, "by good words and fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple." Against such teachers St. Paul felt it necessary to caution his converts frequently[a]; since, though agents only of the prince of darkness, they put on the appearance of angels of light[b]. Against such he here cautions the Hebrew Christians, intreating them to bear in mind what they had been taught by those who had been over them in the Lord, and not to suffer themselves to be turned aside from the truth which they had received.

In the words here addressed to them, we see,

I. A caution given—

There were, even in the Apostolic age, "many vain-talkers

[a] Rom. xvi. 17, 18. [b] 2 Cor. xi. 13—15.

talkers and deceivers, and especially amongst the Circumcision, who by their subtle disputations subverted whole houses[c]," and "caused the way of truth to be evil spoken of[d]." In this day likewise there are not wanting teachers of a similar description, who bring forward some favourite notions of their own, "in order to draw away disciples after them[e]." Against these we must at all times be on our guard, lest at any time we be carried away,

1. By legal doctrines—

[It was against these more particularly that the Apostle here cautioned the Hebrews. The great scope of his epistle was to shew, that the rites and ceremonies, on which the Jews laid so great a stress, were abrogated, and superseded by a better dispensation. And the strange doctrines hinted at in the text are put in immediate contrast with "meats, (such as were enjoined or prohibited under the Mosaic dispensation,) which had not profited those who had been occupied therein." To such an extent were the ceremonies of the law insisted on by some, that they affirmed that no one could be saved without a strict observance of them[f]. Thus they perverted the Gospel of Christ, by uniting with the blood of Christ another ground of dependence for our justification before God[g].

And though Judaism is not now insisted on as it then was, there is the same disposition in men to combine something of their own with faith in Christ, as a joint ground of their hope. Men are still as averse as ever to a free salvation that is all of grace. They would have it to be in some measure "of works;" not aware, that it must be wholly either of works, or of grace[h]: they do not see that the very instant any works of ours are admitted as *meriting* salvation, either in whole or in part, salvation is no more of grace, and man has to all eternity a ground of boasting before God[i].

Be on your guard then that you be not carried away by such legal statements as too commonly prevail even in the present enlightened age: for it is not necessary to go to Papists in order to hear such doctrines: they are still heard amongst us, notwithstanding this error formed the chief ground of our separation from the Church of Rome, and of our *protesting* against their fatal heresies. But know, that, if you add any thing to the work of Christ as a joint ground of your hope, you make void the Gospel of Christ, and must inevitably and eternally perish[k].]

2. By Antinomian doctrines—

[To these also there is a reference in the preceding context. Many

[c] Tit. i. 10, 11. [d] 2 Pet. ii. 1—3. [e] Acts xx. 29, 30.
[f] Acts xv. 1. Col. ii. 16. [g] Gal. i. 7. [h] Rom. iv. 4. & xi. 6.
[i] Rom. iii. 27. [k] Rom. ix. 30—33. & Gal. v. 2, 4.

Many converts, and especially from amongst the Gentiles, had but very imperfect views of that holiness which the Gospel enjoins. The great degree of criminality which attaches to fornication and adultery, was, through the influence of opinions imbibed in their Gentile state, but indistinctly seen: and hence, for the purpose of rectifying their views, the Apostle shews them, that, though marriage was honourable in all, having been ordained by God himself, that species of intercourse, which they were disposed to justify, was most dishonourable, and most offensive in the sight of God, "who would judge both whoremongers and adulterers" with the utmost severity[l]. Many indeed would plead for such indulgences; as we see in the Ephesian Church: but St. Paul, warning the Ephesian converts, says, "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience[m]."

Thus at this time also there are not wanting persons who teach, that the law is not a rule of life to Believers; and that Christ's righteousness being perfect, they have a sanctification in him, and need not seek to have any sanctification in their own souls. From a professed zeal for the honour of Christ, they would set aside all need of personal holiness, and bring men to their heavenly inheritance without putting them to the trouble of seeking a meetness for it.

But this is an awful delusion. It is very specious indeed, because it pretends to exalt the honour of Christ: but, in reality, it greatly dishonours him, inasmuch as it makes him, not a friend of sinners, but of sin; which, if unmortified and unsubdued, would incapacitate the sinner for the enjoyment of heaven, even if he were admitted there[n].

But be on your guard against this doctrine also, a doctrine foreign to the whole tenor of Scripture, from the beginning to the end; a doctrine most injurious to God's honour, directly repugnant to the great end for which Christ came into the world; (which was "to save his people from *their sins*[o];") and utterly subversive of the whole work of the Spirit in the souls of men[p]. Whatever stress we may lay on the work of Christ, (and we cannot possibly rely too much or too simply upon it for our *justification* before God,) it is an unalterable truth, that "*without holiness, (real, personal, universal holiness,) no man shall see the Lord*[q]."]

3. By erroneous doctrines of whatever kind—

[It were endless to attempt to enumerate all the heresies which have arisen, and are yet found, in the Christian Church. Some are entirely subversive of Christianity itself, being nothing less than "a denial of the Lord who bought us[r]." Others are founded

[l] ver. 4. [m] Eph. v. 5, 6. Rev. ii. 14, 20. [n] Rev. xxi. 27.
[o] Matt. i. 21. [p] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27. 1 Pet. i. 2.
[q] Heb. xii. 14. [r] Jude, ver. 3.

founded upon some truth which is carried to excess, and held to the exclusion of other truths which are equally important in their place. Of this kind are the tenets of those who fiercely contend for human systems, whether Calvinistic or Arminian, taking only partial views of Divine truth, and wresting every passage of Scripture which seems to militate against their favourite scheme. The truth is, that the way of Salvation, if we will only submit to be taught of God, is very plain and simple: it is all comprehended in these few words, "Faith working by love." But if, instead of taking the plain declarations of Scripture for our guide, we will refine upon them, and invent modes of speaking which are widely different from them, and insist upon our own subtleties as if they were the very word of God himself, it is no wonder that heresies arise, and divisions ensue. But against all dogmas of man's invention we should be on our guard. In order to our preservation from them, we have in our text,]

II. An antidote recommended—

We should seek to be "established with grace;" or, as that expression imports, we should be established in the Gospel; (for that is the grace to which Jewish ceremonies are opposed, and it is "the grace wherein we stand[a];")

1. As a revelation of grace in itself—

[It is so: it is so altogether: the whole plan, as devised by Almighty God, was formed in his eternal counsels without any reference to human merit, or to any recompence which the whole universe could ever confer. It was undertaken by the Son, purely from his own love and mercy, to die in the place of sinners, and to expiate their guilt by his own blood. The Holy Spirit also engaged to apply that redemption to God's chosen people, and to bring them to the possession of all its blessings by his sovereign and all-sufficient grace. All was the free gift of God to man: and there is not a Christian in the universe who must not say, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

Now to be established in these views is a grand preservative against error of every kind: and a man well grounded in them is incapable of being moved by all the artifices of the most subtle deceivers. Tell the man that he does not deserve the wrath of God; or that he may save himself by the merit of his works; or that, if he cannot save himself entirely, he may in part, by some good works and righteousness of his own; you may perplex him perhaps, especially if he be unaccustomed to weigh the arguments of Sophists; but you can no more convince him, than you can persuade him that he is an angel, or that he is able to create a world. He has within himself the witness of the truths which he maintains;

[a] Rom. v. 2.

maintains; and as complete a consciousness of his need of the Gospel, and of its suitableness to his necessities, as he has of his need of food for his body, and of the suitableness of food to recruit his strength. Hence, as a security against their being beguiled by enticing words, the Apostle says to the Colossian Church, "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving[t]."]

2. As a dispensation of grace to the soul—

[The same covenant, which says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sins will I remember no more," says, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts[u]." It even engages to do this so effectually, that, notwithstanding all their outward temptations and inward corruptions, they shall never finally depart from God[x]. In this light then should the Gospel be viewed, namely, as a provision for the "turning of men, not only from darkness unto light, but from the power of Satan unto God." For this end is "all fulness of grace treasured up in Christ," that "out of it all his people might receive," and that "the grace so conferred may be sufficient for them."

Now if once we are established in this view of the Gospel, we may bid defiance to all the sophistries that would relax our obligation to holiness. We shall see that holiness is the grand constituent of salvation, inasmuch as it is the restoration of God's image to the soul, even of that image which alone can fit us for the enjoyment of his presence, and without which we must remain everlasting objects of his utter abhorrence. Indeed, if once we are established in this grace, all the subtleties of controversialists will lose their power. We shall see that a perfect conformity to God's likeness is the only thing which we need to be concerned about; and the only end for which even the purest principles are of any value. This well fixed in the mind, our walk will be stedfast; nor, however violent the assaults of heretics may be upon us, shall any of them prevail to "carry us away."]

We are yet further called to notice,

III. The recommendation enforced—

"It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace:" yes truly, "it is a good thing:" for it brings,

1. Peace into the soul—

[Those who are tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, or who are entering deeply into controversies of any kind, are

[t] Col. ii. 4, 6, 7.
[u] Jer. xxxi. 33, 34. Heb. x. 16, 17.
[x] Jer. xxxii. 38—41.

are for the most part strangers to peace. They are distracted and disquieted, and not unfrequently "filled with envy, and strife, and railings, and evil surmisings," and all manner of unhallowed dispositions[y]. Their very contentions are for the most part not so much for truth, as for victory. But the man whose heart is established with grace, dwells, as it were, in the higher regions of the air, where he is not subject to those storms and tempests which agitate our lower world. His mind is kept in perfect peace, because it is fixed, trusting in the Lord. He is content to be ignorant of things which God has not revealed; and to let people entertain different sentiments from himself on matters of doubtful disputation. He knows assuredly, that, whilst his faith in Christ is firm and operative, he cannot materially err; and that "he shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."]

2. Stability into his life and conversation—

[He leaves others to enter into controversies; he is concerned only about the maintenance of the Divine life in his soul. Others are espousing different sentiments, and joining with different parties; and some are running the whole round of Christian profession, one day holding communion with one Church or people, and another day anathematizing them as heretics and fanatics. But the Christian who is established with grace, moves on in one even tenor, and makes his profiting daily to appear. He grows in grace, he makes visible attainments in holiness, "he runs with patience the race that is set before him." Like the sun in its course, he diffuses blessings all around him: and, having finished his course, he sets, to rise in another hemisphere, where he shall shine with undiminished lustre for ever and ever[z].]

ADDRESS—

1. Be not ignorant of the Gospel of Christ—

[It is quite a mistake to imagine, that, because there is a great diversity of sentiment upon some points, there is nothing certain: for on the points which are of fundamental importance, all true Christians are agreed. They are all agreed, that we are guilty, helpless, and undone: that it is in and through the Lord Jesus Christ alone that any human being can be saved: that we need his righteousness to justify us, and his grace to sanctify our corrupt nature: and that, whatever attainments in holiness any man may reach, he will still be indebted to the free, and sovereign, and undeserved grace of God for all from first to last. Get the knowledge, the *practical* knowledge of this; and all will be well. You may clearly see that much human learning is not necessary for this: on the contrary, human learning, *if unsanctified*, is rather an impediment to this, especially *if it be relied upon*, as it too often is, *as a sufficient instructor, and a safe guide*[a]. There

[y] 1 Tim. vi. 3—5. [z] Matt. xiii. 43. [a] 1 Cor. i. 18—21.

There is no safe guide but the Holy Spirit: and "he often reveals unto babes and sucklings the things which are hid from the wise and prudent [b]." The way to seek divine knowledge is, to study the holy Scriptures with humility and prayer[c]: and if you do so study them, you shall "be guided into all truth," and "be made wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus."]

2. Be not satisfied with indistinct and narrow views of it—

[There are in the Gospel "heights and depths" that can never be explored. We may not indeed have different truths brought to our view: but the same truths will be brought with ten-fold clearness and power to the soul. It is the same sun which lights us amidst the gloom of winter, and in the height of summer: but how different are the sensations it excites, and the effects it produces! Yet of these feelings and these effects the peasant is as sensible as the greatest monarch upon earth. Know ye then your privilege, every one of you, and seek the enjoyment of it: and let every one of you labour and pray, that "his light be as that of the sun which shineth more and more unto the perfect day[d]."]

[b] Matt. xi. 25. [c] Prov. ii. 1—6. [d] Prov. iv. 18.

MCXXXIV.

THE SACRIFICES TO BE OFFERED BY CHRISTIANS.

Heb. xiii. 15, 16. *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. But to do good, and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

THE Jewish yoke was very heavy; and the observance of the Mosaic rites was burthensome in the extreme. From that we are happily delivered. Yet have we an altar upon which we are to attend, and sacrifices which we are bound to offer. Our altar indeed is very different from that of the Jews: as the Apostle has said in the preceding context; "We have an altar, of which they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle[a]." Of their own altar they did partake; the greater part of all the sacrifices being allotted them for their support[b]. But even

[a] ver. 10. [b] Numb. xviii. 12, 13.

even under that dispensation, an intimation was given them, that, when the great offering, which their sacrifices typified, should be presented, they could have no part in it. The offerings which were presented by them for the expiation of sin, were burned without the camp; no part of them being appropriated to the use of the priests [c]. And such is the sacrifice which was offered by our Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of the whole world, when he suffered without the gates of Jerusalem: of which therefore they who continued under that dispensation could not participate. We alone, who renounce all dependence on the works of the law, and found all our hopes on the atonement which Christ has offered, can eat of this altar, and enjoy the benefits which by his meritorious death and passion he has purchased for us. Again, though of other sacrifices the Priests might eat, they might on no account eat the blood: *that* must be poured out even to the last drop [d]. But of our sacrifice, we both eat the flesh and drink the blood: and it is only by so doing that we can obtain eternal life. Indeed on that body and blood we are to feed continually; it is the daily feast of our souls: as our Lord has said, "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed [e]." Having been offered by our Lord Jesus Christ himself on the altar of his Deity, (for he is at once the Altar, the Sacrifice, and the Priest,) it is accepted for us: and it is both our duty and our privilege to eat of it. But whilst we thus partake of this altar, we must ourselves offer sacrifices upon it, even "our whole selves, as living sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ [f]." To present these is,

I. Our duty—

Two kinds of sacrifices we are to offer: those,

1. Of praise to God—

[Praise is most justly due to Him from all his creatures; but more especially from those who have been favoured with a revelation of his will, and with the ordinances of his grace. The Jews, dark

[c] Lev. vi. 30. & xvi. 27. [d] Deut. xii. 23—25.
[e] John vi. 53—55. [f] Rom. xii. 1.

dark as their dispensation was, were infinitely indebted to God for it[g]. But infinitely greater are our obligations to him for the fuller manifestations of his mercy to us in Christ Jesus, and for that better covenant of which Jesus is the Surety and the Mediator — — — "We therefore should offer to our God the sacrifices of praise continually." We should do it, not only at the appointed seasons of Morning and Evening, which in a lax sense may be called "continually[h]," but throughout the whole day; not indeed in the way of a formal service, but in the frame and habit of our minds[i]. This by the Prophet is called "the *calves* of our lips[k]," and, in our text, "the *fruit* of our lips;" because, as calves and first-fruits of the earth were offered in sacrifice under the law, so are *praises* under the Gospel dispensation. Under both dispensations, the duty of acknowledging our obligations to God, and our dependence on him, is the same: and therefore, as the Jews *confessed* both the one and the other by their offerings, so are we to do in ours, "*giving thanks* to his name[l]."

But it is *by Christ* only that our offerings can come up with acceptance before God: for, as the Jews were not at liberty to offer sacrifice any where but upon the altar in Jerusalem[m], so neither can we present to God any sacrifice but on this altar, the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can sanctify our gifts, and render them in any respect worthy of God's acceptance[n]. Of this it becomes us to have as distinct a conception as the Jews themselves had; and never for a moment to approach our God without a deep conviction upon our minds, that in Christ only can either our persons or our services be ever pleasing in the sight of God[o].]

2. Of beneficence to man—

[This also is a duty incumbent on us. God has so ordered in his providence, that there shall always be some who shall stand in need of assistance, and others, who, as his almoners, shall be enabled to dispense the benefits which are required[p]; that by a free exercise of benevolent affections there may be such a measure of equality produced, as may best subserve the interests of the whole[q]. Hence, "to do good, and to communicate," is an employment in which we should be daily occupied, each of us according to our ability. The poorest, as well as the richest, should, as far as God has enabled him, find delight in this duty[r]. Nor should we ever be so engaged in exercises of devotion, as to forget that we have duties to our fellow-creatures, which, in their place, are of equal importance with devotion itself. We may

[g] Rom. iii. 2. [h] Exod. xxix. 42. [i] 1 Thess. v. 16—18.
[k] Hos. xiv. 2. [l] ὁμολογούντων. [m] Deut. xii. 13, 14.
[n] John xiv. 6. [o] 1 Pet. ii. 5. [p] Deut. xv. 11.
[q] 2 Cor. viii. 14, 15. with Exod. xvi. 16—18. [r] 2 Cor. viii. 2—4, 12.

may find it good to be on Mount Tabor: but we must not protract our stay there, when there is work to be done by us in the plains below[s]. The duties of the second table must not be overlooked, any more than those of the first: nor can any measure of delight in God ever justify us in neglecting the offices of love to man. Liberality to the poor, especially when offered upon this altar, the Lord Jesus Christ, is as pleasing to God as any other offering whatever. Such was St. Paul's view of the succours which he had received from the Christians at Philippi; which he represents as "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, and well-pleasing to God[t]." But this also must be offered only through the Lord Jesus Christ: if presented as *in itself* good and acceptable, it would be rejected of God with as much abhorrence as the bribe of Simon Magus was by the apostle Peter[u]. The direction given by God himself, and which must never in any case be forgotten, is this; "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him[x]."]

But that which in one view is our duty, in another view is,

II. Our privilege—

In this view the injunction in our text is introduced: "We have an altar, of which the Jews, whilst so continuing, have no right to eat:" "*therefore*" let us enjoy our high privileges, and offer our sacrifices continually upon this altar. And truly, to offer these sacrifices is a most inestimable privilege: for,

1. We may all present them in our own person—

[*This* the Jews could not do: they must come to the Priest, and put their sacrifices into his hands: and he alone could offer them upon the altar. But *we* who believe in Christ, are "a kingdom of priests:" Amongst us there is "no distinction of male or female, bond or free; but we are all one in Christ Jesus[y];" "we are all kings, and priests unto our God[z]:" "the veil of the Temple being rent in twain," we all have access unto God through Christ[a]," "even into the holiest of all, by that new and living way which he hath opened for us[b]."

Now let us only conceive what were the feelings of the Jews when they saw their High Priest on the day of annual expiation go within the veil into the presence of Jehovah, even to his mercy-seat, on which he dwelt in the Shechinah, the symbol of his

[s] Matt. xvii. 1—5. [t] Phil. iv. 18. [u] Acts viii. 18—20.
[x] Col. iii. 17. [y] Gal. iii. 28. [z] Rev. i. 6.
[a] Eph. ii. 18. [b] Heb. x. 20—22.

his more immediate presence: how highly privileged would they consider him! and how happy would they have accounted themselves, if that honour had been vouchsafed to them! But you, Beloved, need not envy even the angels themselves: for through Christ you may go, every one of you for himself, "unto God as your exceeding joy," and may "lay hold of him," and commune with him, and hear his voice, and taste his love, and receive into your souls the communications of his grace and peace. It was not of himself alone, but of all the godly without exception, that St. John affirmed, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ[c]."

[Learn then, Brethren, to appreciate this privilege aright: and let the thought of it encourage you to draw nigh unto your God continually, and to present to him such sacrifices as the occasion may require:]

2. We may be perfectly assured of God's acceptance of them—

[There is an excellency in our sacrifices which there was not in those which were offered by the Jewish Priests: theirs were of no value at all, but as "shadows of good things to come:" *in themselves* they were "carnal ordinances," deserving of no better name than "weak and beggarly elements[d]:" and, if not offered with a suitable frame of mind, they were altogether hateful to God, even as hateful as the cutting off of a dog's neck, or the offering of swine's blood[e] — — — But where does God ever speak in such degrading terms of our sacrifices? "Whoso offereth me praise," says he, "glorifieth me[f];" and, "A cup of cold water offered to a disciple for his sake, shall in no wise lose its reward[g]." The two are by God himself brought into a comparison thus: "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High[h]:" "to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams[i]."

Besides, the altar on which we present our offerings sanctifieth every thing that is put upon it. Leaven was expressly forbidden to be offered on the Jewish altar[k]: yet in a sacrifice of thanksgiving, or of the first-fruits, it might be offered[l]. So shall "the fruit of our lips," and "the first-fruits of our substance" be accepted[m], notwithstanding any imperfection with which they are offered, if only they be presented through Christ with an humble and contrite spirit: for Christ, our great High Priest, who is our altar, is also "our

[c] 1 John i. 3. [d] Gal. iv. 9. & Heb. vii. 9.
[e] Cite at length both Isai. i. 11—14 & lxvi. 3.
[f] Ps. l. 23. [g] Matt. x. 42. [h] Ps. l. 13, 14.
[i] 1 Sam. xv. 22. [k] Lev. ii. 11.
[l] Lev. vii. 11—13. & xxiii. 17. [m] Prov. iii. 9, 10.

"our Advocate with the Father;" and "the incense of his prayers ascendeth with every sacrifice which we offer, and insures the acceptance of it before God[n]."

Who with such an assurance as this would not wish to present his sacrifices unto God daily, and without ceasing?]

3. We all have liberty to eat of our own sacrifices—

[This liberty, in reference to some sacrifices, was conceded to the offerers under the Jewish law[o]: but to us it is conceded in every offering which we can present. Do we offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving? "our mouth shall be filled as with marrow and fatness, whilst we praise our God with joyful lips[p]." Do we offer our mite for the relief of his indigent and distressed people? hear how he speaks of it: "If thou deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the poor that are cast out to thy house; if, when thou seest the naked, thou cover him, and hide not thyself from thine own flesh; then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; and the glory of the Lord shall be thy rere-ward." And again; "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and *make fat thy bones:* and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not[q]." I appeal with confidence to all: When did you ever present any offering, whether of gratitude to God or love to man, upon this altar, and not feed richly on it yourselves? When did not fire descend from heaven into your soul, to testify of God's acceptance of your offering? or when did you not, after such an offering, depart, "filled and satisfied with the fatness of his house[r]?" At no period did he ever dismiss you, without satiating your weary soul, and replenishing your sorrowful soul[s]." Abound then in these sacrifices, and it shall be well with you; for you shall eat of them richly both in time and eternity[t].]

ADDRESS:

1. To the poor votaries of this world—

[What a wretched and worthless altar have you! and what costly offerings are you daily presenting upon it! Your time, your talents, your very souls, are you sacrificing upon that altar! You would weep over the devotees who cast themselves under the wheels of the car of Juggernaut: why do ye not weep over yourselves, when, with all your light and knowledge, you are acting a part not less infatuated than they? Compare your state with that of

[n] Rev. viii. 3, 4. [o] Deut. xii. 5—7. [p] Ps. lxiii. 5.
[q] Isai. lviii. 7—11. [r] Ps. xxxvi. 8. [s] Jer. xxxi. 25.
[t] Isai. iii. 10. 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

of the true Christian. He lives only to serve, and honour, and exalt his God: but you live only to please the world, and to gratify yourselves. He accounts nothing too great to sacrifice unto Jehovah: you will not sacrifice one lust, or interest, for him. To the world, and to self, do you devote your every hour, your every thought. And whilst you have eaten of your altar, which of course you have done, what have you done but "feed upon ashes, whilst a deceived heart hath turned you aside, so that you could not deliver your soul, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand[u]?" And do you suppose, that, whilst you are partaking thus of the world's altar, you can partake of the Lord's also? Assuredly not: "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils[x]:" "ye cannot serve God and Mammon[y]." I call you then to consider what will be the issue of a wordly life: for "if ye love the world, whatever you may imagine, the love of the Father is not in you[z]." Let me intreat you then to go to your God, and to present to him that prayer of David, "Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with them that work iniquity; and *let me not eat of their dainties*[a]." For be assured, that, if ye devote not yourselves to God through Christ in this world, ye can never dwell with him in the world to come.]

2. To the friends and worshippers of the Lord Jesus Christ—

[What a blessed employment is yours! A life of praise to God; and a life of love to man! What can you wish for more? What can add to your happiness, except it be an increase of grace to live more than ever unto God? Look at the angels around the throne: methinks, you have already invaded their office, and entered upon their bliss. Are they ever praising God? That is your employment day and night. Are they "Ministering Spirits, sent forth to minister unto them that shall be heirs of salvation[b]?" That also is your daily work, who are "doing good unto all men, and especially unto them that are of the household of faith[c]." Go ye on then in this blest career: and abound daily more and more. And know that, as by the neglect of your duties "you may suffer loss in heaven[d]," so by abounding in all the fruits of righteousness, ye may augment your blessedness in heaven, and obtain through Christ "an abundant entrance" into the realms of bliss[e].]

[u] Isai. xliv. 20. [x] 1 Cor. x. 21. [y] Matt. vi. 24.
[z] 1 John ii. 15, 16. [a] Ps. cxli. 4. [b] Heb. i. 14.
[c] Gal. vi. 10. [d] 1 Cor. iii. 15. [e] 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

MCXXXV.

THE DUTY OF PEOPLE, AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MINISTERS.

Heb. xiii. 17. *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

MAN, as a social being, has duties to the society of which he is a member: and of these duties he must be reminded, no less than of those which are purely personal. The Church of Christ is one great family [a], in which, as in every other family, order must be observed, by the exercise of power in those who preside, and a submission to it amongst those who are placed under their direction. The government that shall be exercised in it is appointed by God himself; who has invested his Ministers with power to rule, and has required of their people a submission to their authority. But as, on the one hand, there has been amongst some who have presided an unscriptural usurpation of authority, very different from that which God ever committed to them; so, on the other hand, there is amongst others a very unscriptural disregard of that authority which is legitimate, and which every Minister of God is bound to exercise in that society over which he presides. For the due administration of order and good government in the Church, the Apostle, having finished his directions respecting *personal* duties, proceeds to give one, which more immediately relates to our *social* intercourse, but which is of the greatest consequence to the welfare of that family of which we are members.

In calling your attention to this Apostolic precept, I shall have occasion to set before you,

I. The duty of people towards their Minister—

A shepherd naturally presides over his flock: and so must a Pastor of God's Church exercise rule over that flock which he feeds, over which the Holy Ghost

[a] Eph. iii. 15.

Ghost himself has constituted him an Overseer[b]." Not that *civil* power was ever delegated by God to his Ministers: that exclusively belongs to the civil Magistrates[c]. If the Lord Jesus Christ, when appealed to as an Arbitrator in relation to *civil* rights, said, "Who made me a Ruler and a Divider over you[d]?" much less can any claim of temporal authority belong to those who are called by him to the administration of affairs which are purely spiritual. Yet is there power given to Ministers,

1. As Ambassadors from God—

[August as this title is, we claim it as of right belonging to us: for though we would by no means exalt ourselves, it becomes us, and is our bounden duty, to "magnify our office[e]." We come from God to you, and proclaim to you in his name the terms on which he will forgive your past rebellion, and receive you to his favour. It is in the very place of Christ that we stand, when we intreat you for his sake to be reconciled to God[f]. The word which we preach to you is God's: and by you "it must be received, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God[g]." If our testimony be rejected, it is not man, but God himself, that ye reject[h]. Doubtless, you must judge how far the voice of the Minister accords with the word of God: for it is to that extent only that you are bound to pay any attention to it: and so far are you to be from receiving the word of man implicitly and without examination, that you are required of God himself "not to believe every Spirit, but to try the Spirits whether they be of God[i];" and to "prove all things, and hold fast that only which is good[k]." But when "the word which is delivered to you is that only which your Minister has himself received from the Lord[l]," then must you obey it as much as if it was delivered to you by God himself in an audible voice from heaven.

Now then we hesitate not to declare, that all which we preach unto you respecting your fallen state, and the necessity of your believing in Christ as the appointed Saviour of the world, and of your giving up yourselves to him "in body, soul, and spirit, to be sanctified wholly" to his service, is the very truth of God revealed in his Gospel: and whilst we affectionately intreat, we do also authoritatively enjoin, your acceptance of it, and your submission to it: and we affirm, that, if ye reject this Gospel, ye do it at your

[b] Acts xx. 28. [c] Rom. xiii. 1—6. [d] Luke xii. 13, 14.
[e] Rom. xi. 13. [f] 2 Cor. v. 20. [g] 1 Thess. ii. 13.
[h] Matt. x. 40, 41. 1 Thess. iv. 8. See also 1 Sam. viii. 7.
[i] 1 John iv. 1. [k] 1 Thess. v. 21. [l] 1 Cor. xv. 3.

your peril, and with a certainty of incurring God's everlasting displeasure[m].]

2. As Stewards over his family—

[This also is a character belonging to us[n], and a character with which a measure of authority is of necessity connected[o]. Under that character we must, at the peril of our own souls, be faithful to you, and to our God, whose servants we are[p]. Whatever we judge to be the portion most requisite for your spiritual health, that we must administer, whether it be instruction or exhortation, consolation or reproof. We must no further seek to please you, than will be for your real welfare[q]: if we go beyond this, we cannot be servants of Jesus Christ[r]. Of course, in the exercise of discipline, there will be some things which will be more clear, and some which will be of a more dubious character. In those which are clear, and where the word of God has precisely marked the course to be pursued, the submission of the people to the sentence of the Minister should be willing and unreserved: and in those which, though not expressly defined by God, are necessary for the maintenance of order, a willing deference should be paid to the judgment of him on whom the great responsibility rests, and to whom authority has been committed by God himself for the good of the whole[s]. "Not that Ministers are to be lords over God's heritage[t]," or to "have dominion over the faith" of any man[u]: but still, even in dubious matters, a degree of submission is due to them, that order may be observed, and the affairs of the Church be well administered, for the good of the whole[x]. This is the kind of rule which a parent exercises in his family; and in a spirit of paternal love must it be exercised by Ministers in the House of God[y].]

These observations will acquire additional weight, if we attend to,

II. The considerations with which this duty is enforced—

Two considerations are here urged, as motives to a cheerful acquiescence in the duty prescribed:

1. The return due to them—

[Ministers have taken upon themselves to seek to the uttermost the spiritual and eternal welfare of those who are committed to their care: and, when duly impressed with the importance of their

[m] Heb. ii. 3. 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18. [n] 1 Cor. iv. 1.
[o] Luke xii. 42. [p] 1 Cor. iv. 2. [q] Rom. xv. 2.
[r] Gal. i. 10. [s] 2 Cor. x. 8. & xiii. 10. 1 Tim. v. 17.
[t] 1 Pet. v. 3. [u] 2 Cor. i. 24. [x] 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16.
[y] 1 Tim. iii. 5.

their office, they "watch for souls as those that must give account. When they undertake this office, they know, that if any perish through their neglect, the blood of those who perish will be required at their hands[z]." Under this fearful responsibility, "they watch for souls," trembling lest, through their ignorance, or sloth, or cowardice, any have the truth withheld from them, or the means of salvation unprofitably dispensed to them. They feel their insufficiency[a], and are ready at times to regret that ever they made themselves answerable to so awful an extent. But a "dispensation having been committed to them, they know that a woe attends them," if they discharge not their office with fidelity and diligence[b].

Now then I ask, Is nothing due from you to such friends and benefactors? When they, from love to your souls, and from an ardent desire to impart unto you the blessings of Salvation, make "themselves your servants for Christ's sake[c]," renouncing all worldly cares, pleasures, and advantages, and consecrating all their time and talents exclusively to you, is there no love, no respect, no deference to be shewn to them? *This, I am sure, is not God's judgment respecting them*: for he requires, that "you esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake[d]:" and if you refuse them this tribute, you are guilty of gross injustice to them, and of vile ingratitude to God, whose commission and authority they bear.

If you suppose that their living of the altar is a sufficient recompence, I must observe, that there is scarcely a faithful servant in all the Church of God who might not turn his talents to a far better account, if pecuniary emolument be the standard by which his recompence is to be estimated. As for the "Shepherds who feed themselves, and not the flock," I speak not of them: I leave them to their own fearful responsibility[e]: but of faithful Pastors, I affirm, that, if they could have the whole world for their hire, they would despise it all in comparison of one soul, whom they may present to God as begotten by their Ministry and saved by their efforts[f]. I say, then, ye are debtors to them to a great amount: if they have been your spiritual fathers, ye owe them your own souls[g]: and if they are only your instructors, yet, as watching *with all tenderness and fidelity for your souls, their griefs and their joys should be the griefs and the joys of you all*[h].]

2. The benefit accruing to yourselves—

[Daily do they go to God, to give up, as it were, an account of the Stewardship committed to them: and this they do either with joy or grief, according as they find success or disappointment in their Ministerial labours. See what grief St. Paul experienced when

[z] Ezek. iii. 17—21. & xxxiii. 7—9. [a] 2 Cor. ii. 16.
[b] 1 Cor. x. 16, 17. [c] 2 Cor. iv. 5. [d] 1 Thess. v. 12, 13.
[e] Jer. xxiii. 1, 2. Ezek. xxxiv. 1—10. Zech. xi. 17.
[f] 1 Tim. iv. 16. with 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20. [g] Philem. ver. 19.
[h] 2 Cor. ii. 3.

when his people walked disorderly[l]: and, on the other hand, with what extatic joys he was filled, when they walked worthy of their high calling[k]! So it is with every Minister, in proportion as he approves himself faithful to his God. And how deeply are your interests involved in these exercises of your Minister's soul! When he sees you disobedient to the word, and regardless of his paternal admonitions, how do his hands hang down, and his spirit sink within him! Truly, it is "with grief," and "with groanings," (as the word imports,) that he goes to his God from day to day. And the whole of his Ministry, in its ardour, in its unction, in its whole character, is lowered, when he has to labour amongst a proud, a worldly, a contentious, a gainsaying people. His mouth is stopped; and, instead of finding an enlargement of mind, and a liberty of utterance towards them, he is constrained rather to speak only in tears of anguish[l], and, as it were, in the groans of one that is travailing in birth[m].

On the other hand, in what tender strains did the Apostle address those who had received his word with power, and evinced its influence by a holy and heavenly conversation! He was amongst them "as gentle as a nursing mother; and was so affectionately disposed towards them, that he was willing to impart to them, not the Gospel only, but his own soul also, because they were dear unto him[n]." How would words, proceeding from him in such a strain, "distil as the dew," and penetrate their inmost souls! And when he felt such enlargement of heart towards them, what corresponding feelings would be generated in their souls[o]! Such then are still the feelings of faithful Ministers in this day. They experience either straitness, or enlargement, according as their people evince a disposition that becomes the Gospel, or a state of mind tending to obstruct its influence. And therefore, if you seek nothing but your own "profit," you should, by a loving, submissive, and obedient spirit, encourage the efforts of your Minister, and impart comfort to his soul.

But it is not to the present world only that this consideration must be confined. For though it is true, that a glorified soul can feel no grief, any more than God himself can, yet, for the purpose of impressing our minds, may this idea be predicated of them, as well as of him. And, oh! think of the joy with which they will present to God their obedient children in the last day[p], and the grief with which they will appear as "swift witnesses" against such as were intractable and disobedient[q]! Verily, their griefs will be "unprofitable indeed to you," when the very word which they have spoken to you will be found only "a savour

[l] 2 Cor. ii. 4. [k] 1 Thess. iii. 9, 10. [l] Phil. iii. 18.
[m] Gal. iv. 19. [n] 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8. [o] 2 Cor. vi. 11—13.
[p] Isai. viii. 18. Phil. ii. 16. [q] Mal. iii. 5.

savour of death" unto you, and the means of your more aggravated condemnation[r].]

"Suffer ye then a word of EXHORTATION"—

[How long we shall stand in our present relation to each other, God alone knows: but this we know, that I must give up an account to God of my labours, as you also must of your improvement of them. O that I may be found faithful! and may you also so improve my Ministry, that I may give up an account of you with joy, and not with grief! Imagine not your work done, when you have heard the word delivered to you. In reality, both your work and mine is then but just begun. We must watch for each other, and each of us for ourselves. And oh! may you never have occasion for that painful reflection, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof, and *have not obeyed the voice of my teacher*, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me[s]!" And may I so watch, and so labour, that, like the Apostle himself, I may "be pure from the blood of all men[t]!"]

[r] 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. [s] Prov. v. 12, 13.
[t] Acts xx. 26. N. B. If this were the subject of *a Visitation Sermon*, there should be a suitable Address to Ministers also.

END OF VOL. X.

LONDON:
Printed by R. Watts, Crown Court, Temple Bar.

00110973

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 21 October, 2015